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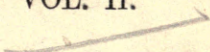
THE
MEMOIRS
OF A
FEMME DE CHAMBRE.

A NOVEL.

BY THE
COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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MEMOIRS
OF
A FEMME DE CHAMBRE.

CHAPTER I.

“YES,” soliloquized Lord Almondbury, “she is a very beautiful girl, and who knows whether she be really as cold and reserved as she appears. Women, even the most youthful of the sex, are such adepts in deception! It is, however, well worth while to ascertain this point; and as faint heart never won fair lady, I will make the experiment. But how is it to be made? Ah! there’s the question. She is never to be seen alone,—Adelaide is with her all day, and she spends her evenings with my wife. She walks every day in Kensington Gardens,

I know, and is now there. *Allons*, I'll stroll there as if by chance, enact *le bon papa* by walking with my daughter, and judge by Miss Stratford's manner how far I may venture. She is so devilish pretty that it is worth while trying to please her."

The result of these cogitations was, his lordship putting his horse into a canter, and directing his course towards another entrance to Kensington Gardens than that at which his carriage had a short time previously set down his daughter and her governess; for he did not wish to furnish a topic for the gossiping of his groom, coachman, and footman, who might form suspicions of his motive for going there. A man conscious of his own evil intentions is ever prone to imagine that others will detect them; hence the wicked are much more on their guard than the good, and by a cunning, which is the fruit of their evil qualities, often escape a censure to which the artless and undesigning but too frequently lay themselves open, by a want of attention to appearances.

Lord Almondbury had not long entered

Kensington Gardens when he saw Selina Stratford and her pupil at a little distance, and as they walked on before him, he had an opportunity of observing the attention excited by Selina; every man that encountered her, pausing, when she passed, to look after her, while she moved on wholly unconscious that she was an object of general attraction.

Lord Almondbury's was a mind to be influenced by the opinions of other men in certain points. Struck at the first view by the beauty of Selina, he now became still more disposed to yield to its attraction, as he beheld the admiration it excited in others, and reflected that in all probability, some one of those who now paused to gaze on her, would discover her abode, and address to her by letter the declaration he was so anxious not to be forestalled in.

"Yes, there is no time to be lost," thought he, as he quickened his pace to overtake her he was so anxious to join. No symptoms of pleasure at the unexpected meeting beamed in the countenance of his only child, and the usually reserved deportment of her governess

assumed even a more chilling aspect as he signified his intention of walking with them. Somewhat awed by Selina's manner, he took the hand of his daughter, instead of remaining by her side as he had originally intended, and then uttered something about his desire of becoming better acquainted with Lady Adelaide.

"You speak Italian, I believe, Miss Stratford?" observed he.

Selina replied in the affirmative.

"Yes, I heard you conversing with Lady Almondbury in that language the other day, and your pronunciation struck me to be so pure, that it occurred to me that it would be a very good opportunity for me to brush up my Italian a little, which I have greatly neglected for some time, by chatting with you."

Selina made no reply; but Lady Adelaide said, "O pray speak French, papa, for then I can understand what is said, for I know French very well, don't I, dear Miss Stratford?"

The father bit his nether lip, and looked angry; but after a moment's reflection, he resumed, "Well, then, Adelaide, as you already

know French so well, the sooner you learn Italian the better, and by hearing Miss Stratford and me converse you will at least acquire a familiarity with the accent, if not the sense of what we utter."

He then turned to Selina, and in tolerably good Italian observed, "that he was not surprised to see the general admiration her beauty excited, that all men paid homage to it as she passed, but that none felt its power so profoundly as he did."

Selina requested that he would select any other subject for his conversation, as no one could be so little acceptable to her as that; and the grave and dignified manner in which she made this reproof, evinced the truth of her assertion.

"But how is it possible to forbear speaking of that which fills the heart?" said he. "Throw off this coldness and reserve. I love you, am rich, and disposed to be generous. I can secure you independence, and will so conduct myself that no suspicion shall light on you. Or, if you prefer it, I will at once provide you

with a house and establishment suitable to your merit, and——”

“Hold, my lord, and no longer insult my ears by such language,” and the cheeks of Selina were crimsoned with indignation and wounded virtue.

“I am sure, papa, Miss Stratford does not like speaking Italian with you,” said little Lady Adelaide, “for see how red her face has got; and I never saw her look angry before.”

“Don’t be such a prude, lovely girl,” resumed Lord Almondbury. “I really would not for worlds insult or pain you; but when I see a beautiful creature like you, immured three parts of the day in a dull school-room, labouring to instruct a spoilt girl like mine, and shut up all the evening in a boudoir that no breath of air ever visits, trying to amuse a poor hypochondriac that is no longer amuseable, and all for a paltry salary, much less than I give my valet, by Jove I can’t stand it; and I long to place you where every luxury, every pleasure, will court your acceptance.”

“I will no longer listen to such insults, my lord,” said Selina, turning to leave the garden. “My position in your lordship’s family should have saved me from them,” and tears filled her eyes and impeded her utterance.

“I knew you would make Miss Stratford angry. See how you have made her weep,” said Lady Adelaide. “Mamma never makes her cry when *she* speaks Italian to her.”

“That troublesome child will make mischief by telling tales, unless you recover your calmness. For your own sake, if not for mine, for the sake of Lady Almondbury, whose delicate health renders any shock dangerous, assume your usual air and manner, and I promise that I will say no more on this subject.”

Selina was so fluttered and agitated that she found great difficulty in subduing her feelings sufficiently to assume a calm demeanour, although she was fully aware of the necessity of it, if only to avoid the inquisitive glances of the passers by, who had noticed her heightened colour and humid eyes. She trembled, too, lest her pupil should reveal to Lady Almond-

bury *her* version of the scene that had just occurred; for the simple statement that Lord Almondbury had joined them in Kensington Gardens, and spoken all the time in Italian to her governess; had made her very angry, and brought tears to her eyes, would be quite enough to enlighten Lady Almondbury on the whole fact, and to inflict a pain and chagrin which, in her feeble state, it was of the greatest importance she should be spared. Yet to continue in the house, after the undisguised avowal of passion made by Lord Almondbury, she felt would be wrong. Cruel man! to compel her to resign a situation in which she had been so happy, and where she had been of use to the interesting and amiable invalid, as well as to her dear little pupil. Such were the thoughts that filled her mind, as silently she retraced her steps to the carriage.

Vexed and disappointed at his utter failure in his base designs, Lord Almondbury walked to the gate where he had left his horse, muttering "curses not loud but deep" on what he called the folly of his intended victim. "I hope

she won't be such a confounded simpleton as to tell Lady Almondbury," thought he. " *That* would be deucedly disagreeable. Not that I have any scene to fear with *her*, for I must do her the justice to say that she never tries any. Whatever her suspicions may be that I am a *mauvais sujet*, she never treated me to a scene of jealousy yet, and so much the better for her; for while she utters no reproaches I feel myself compelled to observe some appearance, at least, of good terms with her. Were she to act differently I could not answer for myself. Women are great fools when they betray their knowledge, or even their suspicions, of their husbands' infidelity; for then they absolve them from the necessity of keeping up appearance, and harden them against the shame first experienced when a man goes astray. My wife's pale check, melancholy look, and patient endurance, often have more effect on me, than all the reproaches that a jealous wife could utter in a long life. Yes, positively, I sometimes feel for the poor thing, especially when I remember how passionately

she once loved, and how entirely she trusted me. Heigh ho! Poor Frances! The first few months of our marriage were indeed halcyon days. She so trusting, I so fond. It is a pity it could not last! Then she became *enceinte*, got ill, lost her beauty. Women *enceinte* always do: could go with me no where, and although at first she looked surprised, nay, hurt too, that I would not stay at home to nurse her, she never uttered a request on the subject; and I soon found myself back with my old cronies, on the same terms as previously to my marriage; and then, when my wife was confined, and of a girl too, instead of a boy, on which I had set my heart, she was so occupied and delighted with her little *pouparde*, that I saw no necessity to fall back into conjugal thralldom. Then her health began to give way. There must be consumption in her family, or what else could make her always ill? The doctors said it was something that preyed on her mind. Cunning dogs! they had heard, I suppose, of some of my proceedings, and intended that as a hint. I would not take it;

besides, I am sure her malady was not of the mind, but of the chest. But even were it otherwise, what could I do? Was I to turn *garde malade*, or enact the *rôle* of a doting husband when I no longer felt the inclination? Women are so foolish and unreasonable; they expect, when they marry, that husbands are to continue lovers for ever, and picture to themselves, poor dupes, that their homes are to be the abodes of never-ceasing bliss. When they find themselves disappointed in these expectations, instead of taking it philosophically, they either abandon themselves to regret, or become regular coquettes to revenge on all men the wrongs they imagine they have received from one. Now we men are wiser. *We* have had experience in love affairs, and know that time, sooner or later, will render us indifferent to the charms we once adored, as well as efface from our hearts any wounds they may have sustained. *We* do not lament when we see indifference replace passion in the hearts of our wives; *au contraire*, it is an end much to be desired, for it saves a poor devil from the jealous scenes

he will inevitably be exposed to when his passion cools, which it is sure to do, and his wife's continues. I verily believe that of my poor Frances would have gone on to the end of the chapter, if I had not taken such pains to destroy all her bright illusions, and disenchant her with her idol—myself. But what the deuce could I do? I could not submit to the trammels imposed by the *exigence* of a love-sick spouse; consequently, to recover and secure my liberty, I was compelled to let her see me in my natural character, and the result has been, that the discovery has injured her peace, and impaired a health never strong enough to resist a disappointment of the heart. Women of her peculiar temperament and character should never marry, for as no man can continue to enact the enamoured lover after he has been a year a husband, they are certain to be disappointed, and to be unhappy for years, if not for ever, under the sense of it.”

So reasoned Lord Almondbury. It never occurred to him that men of *his* peculiar temperament and character should never marry,

certain as he was, that such men could never secure the happiness of a right-minded and amiable wife. No, he looked on women as born to submit to men, their lords and masters, and would have been ready to exclaim, with the sultan in a French opera, when he quits one favourite sultana, who weeps his infidelity, for another and newer flame,

“Dissimulez votre peine, et respectez mes plaisirs.”

Lady Almondbury had too much pride and delicacy to reproach her husband, even had she not been well-convinced of the utter uselessness of such a measure. Aware that he no longer loved her, her sole wish was to retain his respect, and to see him entertain for their child some portion of that affection, the absence of which not only deeply pained her, but was calculated to have an injurious effect on the little girl, who had already evinced, on many occasions, her consciousness of the indifference, if not dislike, of her father towards her. The patience and resignation with which Lady Almondbury submitted to the neglect and unkindness of her

unfeeling and selfish husband, far from operating favourably on his mind, or ensuring his gratitude, served only to encourage his wilfulness. Her forbearance he looked on as a tacit toleration of his conduct; nay, when vexed or irritated abroad, he returned to his own house to vent on the nervous and sensitive invalid the ebullition of a temper never good, but now incurably spoilt by self-indulgence.

Selina experienced an insuperable disinclination to inform Lady Almondbury of the interview with her lord in Kensington Gardens; she felt that she could not name it without betraying, in her countenance at least, some symptoms of the disgust and indignation it had excited in her breast; and yet *not* to state it, might, if the child repeated it, and the chances were that she would, expose her to suspicion. How painful and humiliating was her position! and how did she despise him who had so rendered it! She wished that she could refer to the interview when her pupil was not present, for she feared some *naïve* remark of the clever child might make the mother *au fait* of the truth; and

gladly would she have saved the interesting and amiable invalid the chagrin which she knew it must inflict on her; but, as she could have no opportunity before night of a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Almondbury, and must conduct her pupil to the *boudoir*, as usual, before the child retired to bed, no choice was left, but to name the fact as concisely as possible.

“I hope you had a pleasant walk, Miss Stratford,” said Lady Almondbury.

“Yes; that is to say, no,” was the incoherent reply, Selina blushing to her very temples, from the consciousness of the surprise it must occasion, but, taken unawares by the commonplace, but kindly-meant question. She felt that Lady Almondbury’s eyes were fixed on her face, and her blushes and confusion increased in consequence. It was necessary to say something, and she struggled to appear calm while stating the interview with Lord Almondbury; but her manner was so unlike its usual collected and unembarrassed tone, that Lady Almondbury, alarmed by her changeful cheek and visible emotion, asked her if she were ill, and evinced

such kindness and interest in putting the question, as achieved a total triumph over the self-control of Selina, who burst into tears.

“Dear, good Miss Stratford has been made ill, I am sure, by papa,” said Lady Adelaide; “he *would* stay and walk with us, though he saw Miss Stratford disliked it ; and would talk Italian to her all the time, though she wished to speak French or English. He looked very angry when Miss Stratford would not stay any longer in the gardens, and then walked away to another gate quite in a passion.”

Lady Almondbury became as pale as marble ; her lips quivered with emotion, and she glanced with pitying kindness at Selina, now comprehending the cause of her agitation. Making an effort to recover composure, she turned to her daughter, and gravely rebuked her for commenting on the actions of her papa.

“It is ungrateful, Adelaide,” said she, “so to receive what was meant kindly. It was natural for your papa, seeing you walking, to join you, and question Miss Stratford on your

progress ; and he preferred doing this in a language you do not speak."

The little girl looked abashed, but not convinced ; and, while blushes still mantled on her cheek, she turned to her mother, and, with the pertinacity peculiar to over-indulged children, anxious to exculpate herself from the charge of ingratitude, she demanded, "Why then, mamma, was papa so very much displeased? Good, kind Miss Stratford tells me she is satisfied with me, and would tell papa the same, so that he could not be angry at that."

This logic was so conclusive, that Lady Almondbury could not refute it; but her pale cheek became tinged with red, and her ill-concealed embarrassment pained Selina so much, that she checked the further remarks of the clever child by quickly changing the subject.

When, as usual, she was that evening summoned to the *boudoir* of Lady Almondbury, she felt conscious of a feeling of timidity and constraint never previously experienced since her first entrance into the establishment, nor did the

increased paleness, or heavy eyes, betraying the traces of recent tears, of the amiable invalid, help to reassure her, although Lady Almond-bury's manner, always kind and gentle, was even more so than before.

CHAPTER II.

WITH all the intuitive tact and quickness of apprehension that peculiarly appertain to women of delicacy and sentiment, Lady Almondbury readily divined the whole affair of the *rencontre* in Kensington Gardens, and it needed not the *naïve* disclosures of her daughter to make the mortifying truth deeply, painfully, felt. She could duly appreciate the motives that influenced the conduct of Selina. She saw at a glance the embarrassment and chagrin under which the poor girl laboured, and anxious to relieve her, yet unwilling to censure Lord Almondbury, she hardly knew how to act, or what to say. She could not, without great regret and reluctance, contemplate a separation from one whose society had soothed her solitude, and rendered many an hour of pain and languor, more endurable. A

long illness is apt to engender selfishness even in persons who, previously to its assaults, had been strangers to this too common defect. The *ennui* peculiar to days of physical suffering, and the lassitude that never fails to accompany it, rendering all occupation, either mental or bodily, most difficult and fatiguing, if not impracticable, had been often and painfully experienced by the valetudinarian. The relief consequently afforded by the society of one who loved her, was too great and welcome to be resigned without deep regret; and to save it, Lady Almondbury, yielding for the first time in *her* life to the dictates of selfishness, deliberated whether or not she might still retain the presence of her, who had been such a comforter to *her*, and so excellent a teacher to her child. Where could she hope to find a governess with equal ability and zeal, to replace Miss Stratford near Lady Adelaide? This last reflection was paramount to all others in the mother's heart, and triumphed over the scruples entertained since the discovery of the meeting at Kensington Gardens, on the propriety of retaining Selina under a roof where

she might be exposed to the insulting pursuit of a lawless libertine, who respected neither the home of his wife nor child, nor the purity of her to whom the education of that only child was confided. Of the virtue of Selina, Lady Almondbury entertained not a single doubt, for there was that native dignity and self-respect, inseparable from conscious rectitude, about her, that convinced Lady Almondbury that the arts of even the most practised seducer would be tried in vain on one so right-minded. But, although the virtue of the orphan might escape triumphant from all snares, would she, herself a mother, be justified in retaining her where her reputation might suffer, were the libertine views of Lord Almondbury once made known to others, as they had so lately been made evident to herself? While these painful reflections were passing in the mind of Lady Almondbury, thoughts of a no less disagreeable nature occupied Selina. How was she to break to her kind patroness her desire to withdraw from her house, without exciting mortifying suspicions of the cause? Yet she felt that this step must be

taken ; for to remain would be to grant a tacit encouragement to the unprincipled Lord Almondbury to renew his dishonourable and insulting proposals ; the bare recollection of which sent the blood to her cheeks, and made her heart throb with indignation.

Never had a half hour passed so painfully and slowly in that *boudoir* since Selina Stratford had become an inmate in the mansion, as while these thoughts were passing in the minds of Lady Almondbury and herself. Each felt unwilling to break silence, knowing that it must be to enter on a subject most painful to both ; and this consciousness increased their embarrassment. At length Lady Almondbury spoke, although undecided what line of conduct to adopt. *She* would be governed by what Selina should determine on ; and tremulous from anticipation that her fears would be realised, that the companion whose society had so cheered the long and weary hours of her sick chamber would announce her intention of leaving her, she observed, “ I fear, my dear Miss Stratford, that you are not quite well.” Kindness is

never more deeply felt than when we are meditating a separation from those who bestow it.

The sweet and affectionate tone in which her patroness uttered these few words, brought tears to the eyes of Selina, and her tongue faltered as she replied—"No, dear lady, I am not ill, but"—and here she paused, and for a few minutes was speechless from emotion.

"Do not distress yourself, my dear and amiable young friend," said Lady Almondbury. "If you have any thing painful to communicate, and your agitation but too well prepares me for it, delay pronouncing it until you are more calm, until I too am better able to bear it than at present;" and Lady Almondbury became paler than before, and tears stood in her eyes. She extended her white and attenuated hand to Selina, who pressed it to her lips, and as she felt it tremble in her own, a pang passed through her heart at the notion that she must leave one from whom she had experienced such unvarying kindness and encouragement, and at a period too, when custom had rendered her

efforts to please and be useful to the dear invalid more necessary and acceptable.

“ I fear I must leave you, dear lady,” said Selina, feeling the absolute necessity of not postponing the announcement of her intention.

“ I feared so,” replied Lady Almondbury, and she pressed the hand of Selina, in which her own still rested.

“ Circumstances,” resumed Selina, “ over which I have no control, compel this, to me, most painful step ; for your goodness to me, dear lady, the gratitude it has created in my heart, and the affection I feel for dear Lady Adelaide, render my parting from you one of the most painful trials of my life.”

“ You know not how dear, how necessary you are become to me, dear Miss Stratford,” said Lady Almondbury ; careful not to inquire the cause for a step so pregnant with regret to her. Too well did she divine the motive for Selina’s departure ; but feelings of delicacy towards her, as well as an unwillingness to touch on a subject that must inculcate her husband—the once passionately loved partner

of her home and heart, the still dear father of her child—sealed her lips from betraying her knowledge of it. She paused, while deliberating with herself what step to take; and then again pressing Selina's hand, earnestly requested her not to leave her for a few weeks more at least; adding, "I shall be so lonely, dear Miss Stratford; for Lord Almondbury is going to France for a couple of months."

Selina well understood what this intelligence meant. It was a delicate mode of satisfying her mind, that, in yielding to the request of her kind and amiable patroness of remaining a few weeks longer, she need not fear being exposed to any more insults from Lord Almondbury. She felt pleasure in assenting to the proposal, and Lady Almondbury, gratified at having secured the society of a companion so congenial to her taste, even for a few more weeks, resumed her usual calm and sweet manner, and evinced a more than ordinary interest in her favourite.

As Selina looked on her beautiful face—still lovely in spite of the ravages of disease, and

that fragile form so shadowy, yet graceful, which conveyed the notion that it was already fit for the skies—she felt as if in the presence of a being purified from all earth's passions and stains, who was only for a brief period lent to this world, and who might soon, too soon, be called to that heaven, which seemed to be her native sphere.

The poet who asserted that a brave man, struggling with misfortune, was one of the noblest sights, might have added, that a woman, young, beautiful, and good, disappointed in her tenderest affections, resigning herself to a premature grave, and sustaining the assaults of a cureless and painful malady without murmuring, was no less so. Every sentence uttered by Lady Almondbury was instinct with patient sweetness; it was as if disease, in destroying the mortal part, had but more revealed the immortal; as if a veil had been removed from the soul, and allowed its perfection to be all disclosed. A thousand sad reflections crowded into her mind, as she listened to the low, clear, harmonious accents, and gazed on the almost trans-

parent face, radiant with goodness, of the fair being before her. Could no art avail to save her from the arms of death, already extended to grasp her? Was that high and intellectual brow, the throne of noble thoughts, soon to be laid in the grave; and those delicate cheeks and eloquent lips, to become food for the worms?

“Oh! why,” thought Selina, “cannot the chosen of earth, like the beautiful flowers we cherish, droop and fall to the clay, whence they sprang, without all the fearful ceremony of the dark grave, the polluting worm, to consume the mortal coil that for a few brief years serves as an envelope to the spirit, doomed one day to ascend to a purer sphere? Ah! was it to correct and humble us, poor creatures as we are, that it was decreed that those dearest to us on earth, who made the charm, the blessing, of our lives, should no sooner resign their breath, than, in a short time, we are forced to consign them to the grave, to hide the ravages of decomposition, that proves (Oh how painfully to us!) ‘what dust we dote on,’ and yield the hungry worm its prey?”

Such were the gloomy reflections that filled the mind of Selina for a short time; but, as she listened to the aspirations of the fragile being before her, who spoke of that better world, to which she expected soon to be called, less gloomy thoughts passed into her mind. She felt that the decay of the body was but as the casting off the perishable part, as the chrysalis soars from the matter that had enveloped it and kept it from its higher destiny.

It was late ere Lady Almondbury permitted Selina to leave the boudoir. Indisposed to sleep, she poured out to the attentive ears of her delighted auditress the wisdom that is the fruit of grave reflection, on the instability and nothingness of life, forced on her by the sense of her own frail tenure on existence. She felt that her days were numbered; that she must soon go, hence, to be no more seen on earth; but her thoughts reverted to that other, better life, to which the grave is but the portal; and so cheering were her words, and so bright her hopes, that, in listening to them, Selina overcame that internal shudder, that dread of death, with

which the young and healthy are prone to contemplate the awful change. They parted more affectionately than ever. Lady Almondbury saw that she had not over-rated the youthful governess of her daughter, when she had given her credit for as much virtue, and more prudence, than often fall to the lot of persons so young and inexperienced. Her desire to withdraw from a situation where she had, previously to Lord Almondbury's unpardonable attempt to ingratiate himself with her, been so happy, and the tact and delicacy with which she had avoided revealing his turpitude, had made a deep impression on the mind of his wife. Such was precisely the line of conduct she could approve, testifying, as it did, how readily the poor and dependent girl could sacrifice all the advantages enjoyed in her present home, rather than expose herself to the libertine designs of Lord Almondbury, or give uneasiness to his amiable and suffering wife.

When Selina entered her chamber, she found on her table a letter addressed to her in an unknown hand. The circumstance was so unusual

a one, that for a moment she hesitated to open it : a presentiment that it contained nothing agreeable passed through her mind, and she was half disposed to commit it to the flames ; but, after a little reflection, and chiding herself for her weakness of nerves, she broke the seal, and, reading a few lines, found that the letter was from Lord Almondbury, and contained a repetition of the insulting proposals which he had presumed to address to her on that day.

“ I am on the point of leaving England for a tour on the Continent,” wrote the hardened *roué* ; “ and if you, my lovely Miss Stratford, will be the partner of my travels, you will render me at once the happiest and most grateful fellow on earth. I will make a settlement, before we go, that will secure you an ample provision for life, as also for any family that may come. At Paris you can engage a *femme de chambre*, and there, as elsewhere, you shall have an abode and equipage suitable to your beauty and my station. Consider how humiliating and precarious is the position of a governess. In my family you may not have experienced the

caprice and unkindness generally to be met with, but in how few can you expect to find so indulgent a patroness as in my wife? whose delicate health and weakness of nerves dispose her to seek companionship and show friendship, instead of maintaining the reserve and dignity peculiar to ladies in her position. I cannot believe that the disdain and indignation you so unmercifully manifested this day, when I avowed the passion you had excited in my breast, was serious. I looked on it as a clever piece of acting, which had two motives: the first, to enhance your merit in my eyes; and the second, to deceive the *espièglerie* of my daughter, who is, I must acknowledge, remarkably cunning for her age. Come, be honest, and confess I have guessed rightly. You felt certain that Lady Adelaide would tell her mother of our interview, and as certainly mention the displeasure it appeared to afford you, which would exonerate *you* from all blame, and leave censure or suspicion to fall wholly on my shoulders, which are sufficiently large to bear even a greater burden. The manoeuvre was a clever

one, and I admire the skill with which you carried it through; but, having frankly confessed this much, I must now tell you that there is no good to be obtained by continuing it.

“ I cannot admire you more than I do, and am willing to prove it by the liberality of my settlement. Throw off the mask, and make me at once the happiest of men, by accepting my offer. You can feign the illness of some near relative, as an excuse for leaving. Go to Folkstone, where I will join you, and, free as air, and happy as love can make us, we will wing our way to France and Italy; and when we return, you shall find a house replete with every elegance and comfort ready for your reception. Two lines, to say what day you will be ready to start, left on my library table, will oblige your devoted, “ A—— ”

Selina threw the odious letter from her with feelings of indignation, that brought the blood to her very temples. Was it, indeed, possible that her undisguised anger and disgust could have been mistaken by Lord Almondbury for the

ruse and calculation of an unprincipled and shameless coquette? Tears, bitter tears, of insulted virtue chased each other down her cheeks, and she felt as if degraded by remaining a single night under the roof of a man capable of such base conduct as Lord Almondbury had evinced towards her. Might he not, if, after this fresh insult, she continued in the house, misconstrue it into a tacit toleration of his dishonourable views, and postpone his departure for the Continent? Yet how was she, after her promise to Lady Almondbury of remaining with her for some weeks more, to announce or explain the change in her plans to that most amiable and suffering lady? Many were the tears shed that night before sleep deigned to visit her pillow, and well might she have exclaimed with the poet—

“Tired Nature’s sweet restorer, balmy Sleep;
He, like the world, his ready visit pays
Where Fortune smiles: the wretched he forsakes;
Swift on his downy pinions flies from woe,
And lights on lids unsullied with a tear.”

But poor Selina felt her painful position too profoundly to be able to apostrophize, even had

she remembered the lines of Young. Her isolated and unprotected state,—an orphan,—without a single relative in the world on whom she had a claim, her only friends being the worthy Mr. Vernon and his wife,—how was she to relate to them the gross insult offered her by Lord Almondbury; yet this must be done, in order to account for her throwing up a situation which she had so frequently, in her letters to them, expressed her happiness and gratitude at having obtained. Blushes of shame dyed her cheeks at the very notion of this painful, humiliating, but unavoidable disclosure. To a pure-minded and virtuous woman there is nothing so mortifying, save the insult itself, as to have to communicate to others that she has been approached with disrespect, that dishonourable proposals have been addressed to her. Her very purity seems stained in her own eyes, by having to make such an avowal, and she trembles lest those to whom it must be made, should, even for a moment, imagine that aught approaching to levity on her part could have encouraged the gross affront.

But after having wept those bitter tears that flow from outraged feelings, and the consciousness of utter helplessness to avert such insults, back came the pleasing and re-assuring conviction, that the only two friends to whom it would be necessary to give an explanation for leaving her present situation, were little likely to misjudge her, or form the slightest suspicion that the heartless libertine, who had dared to shock her ears by his odious offers, had ever seen anything in her conduct to justify so base a proceeding on his part. This reflection, and the confidence it inspired, soothed her feelings, and gratefully did she thank the Almighty for having giving her friends, on the steadiness of whose esteem she could count in such an emergency, without a single doubt or fear of being misunderstood.

CHAPTER III.

AT an early hour next morning a loud knocking at her door aroused Selina from slumber.

“For Heaven’s sake, Miss Stratford, come to my lady as soon as possible,” said the maid appointed to wait on Lady Adelaide and her governess, “for her ladyship has burst a blood-vessel, and, I fear, is dying!”

Selina lost not a moment in making her hurried toilet, and ran to the chamber of Lady Almondbury, whom she found pale as marble, supported by pillows, and gasping for breath. A faint smile marked her recognition of Selina, to whom she extended her almost transparent hand; she attempted to speak, but the sanguine stream that rushed to her lips impeded her utterance, and proved the danger of the

effort. She shook her head mournfully, and looked in Selina's face with an expression of such sweetness and resignation, as brought the tears to her eyes. The doctor, who had been sent for before Selina was summoned, now arrived. He felt the pulse of his patient, looked grave, and exhorted her not to attempt to speak. Lady Almondbury motioned to Selina to take a seat by her bedside, and the doctor having written a prescription, which was forthwith despatched to the apothecary's, he took his place at the opposite side of the bed.

"Is Lord Almondbury in town?" asked he, addressing the *femme-de-chambre*.

"Yes, sir. His lordship is at home, but we have not called him, as his lordship came home very late."

A faint blush arose to the cheek of Lady Almondbury, who had heard the question and answer; but it soon receded, and left her paler than before. Again the doctor felt her pulse, and while he held her hand a spasm passed over her face.

“My child,” exclaimed Lady Almondbury, turning her eyes with a look of the most earnest appeal to Selina, and again the blood streamed from her lips.

“My dear lady, you must not utter a word; indeed you must not,” said the doctor, evidently very much alarmed.

“May I not bring Lady Adelaide?” demanded Selina, urged on by the appealing glances of the anxious mother.

“Yes, yes, bring the child,” was the answer.

“My—husband,” faltered Lady Almondbury.

“Send for his lordship directly,” said the doctor.

“Dear, dear, mamma!” exclaimed Lady Adelaide, breaking from her governess, and rushing to her dying mother; but the doctor held her back, and restrained her from throwing herself into the outstretched arms of Lady Almondbury.

“You must be gentle, young lady; your mamma is too ill to bear the least exertion.”

The child approached the bed with all possible gentleness, and seizing the hand of her mother,

pressed it fondly to her lips, while the tears fell fast on it.

The doting mother gazed on her child with an expression of unutterable fondness, and tried to speak, but her lips were so tremulous from her deep emotion, that utterance was denied her. It was in truth a piteous sight, to behold that still young and lovely woman, conscious that she was gazing on her only child for the last time, with all a mother's prescience and tenderness throbbing in that heart that was soon to beat no more, yet unable to articulate the blessing she longed to bestow on her fair and youthful head.

Selina was melted to tears, which she turned away her head to conceal, and even the doctor, though accustomed to such heart-rending scenes, was moved.

Lord Almonbury now entered the room, attired in a splendid brocaded silk *robe de chambre* and trousers, and his feet encased in richly embroidered slippers. It was evident that he had arranged his hair, for it bore the marks of having been carefully combed and brushed, and

his whole appearance testified the total absence of that disorder peculiar to a sudden summons from sleep. What a contrast did his gaudy undress and healthful face and person offer to the scene before him! There lay the shadowy form and emaciated though still beautiful face of her who had “loved him not wisely, but too well”—of her who had, in the pride of youth and beauty, when many noble suitors sought her hand, preferred him to all others, and yielded him her whole heart. There she lay, the victim of his inconstancy, neglect, and unkindness, hurried to a premature grave because her heart was not formed of firmer stuff to resist the wounds he had inflicted on it. He had entered the chamber with a step much less noiseless than the occasion warranted, for, having on a former night, some months before, been summoned to his wife, who, by her attendants, was believed to be dying, he concluded that the present was a similar false alarm, and, consequently, was not prepared for the truth. The dying woman recognised his step, turned her eyes on him with a mingled expression of pardon, pity, and love,

such as angels might bestow on erring mortals, and, extending her hand, made a desperate effort to speak.

“Our child,” faltered she, turning her glance on the weeping little girl, “promise me that you will love and cherish her for my sake who have loved you so well. Promise me, dear Henry,—it is my last request.”

Stubborn as was the heart of him to whom it was addressed, this request, uttered by the faltering lips of his dying wife, deeply affected Lord Almondbury.

“You will still live, dearest,” said he, and he pressed her extended hand to his lips.

The dying woman faintly shook her head, and again urged him to promise to love and cherish their child.

“I promise, faithfully promise, dearest!” replied he, and tears started to his eyes, the first that had visited them since his childhood.

“I had forgotten; there is another request I would urge,” said Lady Almondbury. “I wished to secure a provision for Miss Stratford for her life. You will settle one hundred a-year on

her, and present her with one of my watches as a memorial of my affection and esteem."

The exertion of speaking was too much for Lady Almondbury. Her head fell on her bosom, blood streamed anew from her lips, a slight convulsion passed over her face, and all was over.

"Frances! my own poor Frances!" exclaimed Lord Almondbury wildly, "she is not—she cannot be dead—she has only fainted; oh! doctor, give her quickly some restorative!" and sobs almost choked him.

"Alas! my lord, it is all over. Let me lead you from this room. Your child requires all our care, for see, she has fainted."

Lord Almondbury flung himself on the bed in an agony of grief, the truth and intensity of which astonished all present, as much as it would have soothed her who had so lately breathed her last, could she have seen it; for with all a woman's fondness, she would have clung to the thought of being mourned by him, to whom she had given her virgin heart.

Selina, while tears chased each other down

her pale face, assisted in removing Lady Adelaide to her own room, and the doctor having administered *sal volatile* and water to Lord Almondbury, led him to his. It was touching to witness the grief of the poor child when she was returned to consciousness. She could hardly be brought to believe that she was indeed motherless—that the eyes that had so lately gazed on her with such deep tenderness, were closed for ever—that the voice which had never addressed her but with fondness, she should never more hear. Poor girl! If those numbering ten times her years cannot, during the first hours of a bereavement like hers, bring themselves to believe the fearful truth, how little can it be wondered, that stunned by the overwhelming blow, her senses recoiled from it, and that refusing to credit the appalling fact, she entreated again and again to be permitted to return to the chamber of death, saying, “Only let me see my mother, touch her, speak to her, and convince myself that she is, as they say, dead, for I cannot, indeed I cannot, believe it!”

Tenderly did Selina Stratford watch over the

impatient mourner, listen to her lamentations broken by sobs, and endeavour to soothe her, until, exhausted by the violence of her sorrow, the poor child fell into a profound slumber, and then she stole to the chamber of death, unwilling that the last rites due to the departed should be performed solely by menial hands. She found Mrs. Morgan, the faithful waiting-woman of poor Lady Almondbury, sitting in speechless grief by the bedside of her mistress, and aroused her from the stupor in which she seemed plunged by offering her assistance for the sad duties required. “Ah, Miss Stratford, I thank you!” sobbed Mrs. Morgan. “You loved my dear lady, and your hands are worthy of touching her. I could not bear that those who never approached her person in life should ——;” but here the tears of the poor woman impeded her utterance.

With trembling hands Selina fulfilled the melancholy task she had assigned herself. She closed the eyes of the departed, arranged her long and silken tresses, cutting off one for her child; and having gently placed the head on its

pillow, was gratified to see the face, still beautiful in death, wear the calm and angelic expression that had characterized it when in life. Her labours—and they were labours of love—finished, she sank on her knees by the bed, and prayed long and fervently. Never in the house of God did she feel her soul lighted up to its Creator with more exalted piety, than while contemplating the tranquil loveliness of the face of the newly departed, which seemed already to bear the impress of that heaven to which, she hoped and trusted, the spirit had taken its flight. She prayed that the child left on earth might emulate the virtues of the mother, and like her meet death, filled with hope and confidence of mercy, through the Redeemer. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked on that calm, sweet face,—that marble brow, which pain or care could never more contract,—those closed lids, whence never more a tear could steal; and blamed her own selfishness, that could still desire to retain on earth, where only trials and sufferings awaited her, the pure spirit that had fled to its God.

See

She had taken her place by the couch of Lady Adelaide before she awoke, and watched over her with pitying tenderness. Never had she been so forcibly struck with the likeness between the child and her mother, as now; for the juvenile character, which the face of poor Lady Almondbury had assumed in death, rendered the resemblance more visible. But oh, how far less calm was the countenance of the sleeping girl! The brows were curved, traces of recent tears marked the cheeks, the lips occasionally trembled, and convulsive sobs heaved the chest. The word "mamma" was often murmured in that unquiet slumber, and in so plaintive a tone as to increase the sadness of her who watched so tenderly over the sleeper. When Lady Adelaide awoke, and turned her eyes on Selina, a dreamy unconsciousness marked her countenance. She raised her hand to her forehead, as if to recal her memory, and then burst into a passionate fit of grief, saying, "Mamma, mamma! Oh take me to mamma!"

Many were the kind words and affectionate embraces bestowed by Selina on her pupil,

while the latter was being dressed by her maid; but the promise of being taken to see her dead mother had the greatest effect in soothing her. A message from Lord Almondbury, to desire the presence of his daughter, first recalled Selina to a consciousness of the awkwardness of her position in the house of a man who had presumed to address his libertine views to her, now that Lady Almondbury's death deprived her of the protection that lent a sanction to her residence there. She instantly wrote a letter to the excellent Mrs. Vernon, requesting her presence, being determined to be guided by her advice; and, rather than leave Lady Adelaide until the poor child was more reconciled to the bereavement so lately sustained, she would request Mrs. Vernon to remain with her until after the funeral.

When Lady Adelaide returned to her governess, Selina was pleased to find that she appeared less wretched than before her interview with her father. "Poor papa!" said the intelligent little girl, "he is so unhappy and cried so much, that I tried to comfort him. He took

me in his arms and kissed me very often, and said I was like my dear blessed mother. I never thought papa could weep, did you, dear Miss Stratford?"

Glad was Selina to discover by the artless words of her pupil, that the heart of Lord Almondbury was touched by the death of his amiable and neglected wife, and sincerely did she pray that his late remorse and regret would not be of brief duration, being convinced that on the purifying effect of both on his heart, would his affection for his child find its surest basis; but her hopes of this desirable change in him were not very sanguine, as she dreaded that selfishness and habitual indulgence in libertine pursuits, had hardened his nature too much to permit repentance and grief to be more than temporary guests in his breast.

"I think I shall now be able to love papa," resumed the child. "Dear mamma often told me I must love him, but I never thought I could till I saw him weeping for her. He showed me her picture; oh! such a beautiful face, Miss Stratford! not pale and sad, as I always saw

her, but with a fresh pink colour on her cheeks, her eyes so bright that they looked as if they had never shed a tear,—and such a sweet happy smile. I said so to papa, and then he cried afresh, and told me that when that picture was painted, dear mamma was as happy as she appeared; and he muttered something about ‘wretch, and ungrateful;’ I didn’t quite hear what it was, and he struck his hand against his forehead, and looked so miserable, that I kissed him, and said, ‘Poor, dear papa,’ and then he hugged me closely to his breast, and said it was just like what my angel mother would have done. Yes, dear Miss Stratford, he called my own mamma angel, and blessed, every time he spoke of her, and that made me love him very much. I wanted to have some one to kiss and love, as I used to kiss and love mamma. Not that I can ever love any one as I did her. O! no, Miss Stratford, that would be impossible. But let us go to her room.”

It was, indeed, a piteous sight to behold the interesting child gazing on the dead, the tears flowing down her face, and awe restraining her

from lavishing those caresses on the departed which she had been wont to bestow when her mother was in life.

“May I kiss her?” asked she in a whisper, as if fearful of awaking her, whose marble slumber the last trumpet could alone disturb. Selina having assented, she bent down and pressed the lips of her dead mother; but, no sooner had she become sensible of their rigidity and icy coldness, than she withdrew her own in terror, and, throwing herself into the arms of Selina, burst into a paroxysm of grief that it was long ere the soothing expressions of the latter could subdue.

Ah! who is it that has not, under similar circumstances, experienced the same shock?—A shock against which reason would in vain essay to guard us. We know that our bodies are but the temporary abodes of the immortal soul, which no sooner leaves them than these poor tenements of clay betray their native frailty, and retain only the faded likeness of the once-breathing creature; yet how difficult! nay, more, how impossible it is for us to divest ourselves of the love for that poor faded image

that filled our hearts, when it was animated by the vital spark! A love that draws our lips to those icy-cold ones, though their contact almost freezes the blood in our veins, and prompts us to address to those ears, sealed in death, the words of affection that were wont to delight them! How heart-breaking it is to look on that immoveable face, while our own is convulsed by the agony of grief,—its very calmness seeming like a mockery of our woe! If we, arrived at maturity, experience these conflicting emotions, can it be wondered at, that childhood should almost sink beneath them? Poor Lady Adelaide remained for a long time, with her face hidden on the bosom of her governess, listening with breathless interest, while the latter explained to her, in terms suited to her tender years, the mysterious change from life to death.

“Then that is not really *my* mamma,” said the child, pointing with her fingers to the dead, an impression of deep awe on her countenance; “and yet, dear Miss Stratford, how like it is! It looks like an image of her in marble,—so white, so cold! Oh, I wish we could for ever

keep it here, just as it now is ! I would always say my morning and night prayers kneeling by it ; and the sight of what *was*, yet is *not*, my own blessed mother, would prevent my ever again being obstinate or self-willed."

While the child was speaking, Lord Almondbury entered the chamber of death, but so softly, that neither Selina nor her pupil were sensible of his approach. He had overheard Lady Adelaide's wish, and, touched by it, had determined it should be gratified. Selina arose and withdrew, Lord Almondbury having only noticed her presence by a bow ; and his daughter took his hand and kissed it. Her pale face and tearful eyes increased her resemblance to her mother, and her father, glancing from the dead to the living, marked his recognition of the striking resemblance, by pressing his daughter to his breast, ere he told her to go to her governess. Selina, who had remained in the adjoining room to take charge of Lady Adelaide, heard the door locked when her pupil had passed it ; and, ere she had reached the study assigned to the use of the child, the

sound of stifled sobs issuing from the chamber of death struck her ear.

With what altered feelings do we contemplate our own conduct towards those once dear to us, when they are no more, to the light in which we were accustomed to regard it when they lived! How does every unkind look, word, or action, we may ever have directed to them rise up to reproach us, now that atonement is impossible! We forget all provocation, if provocation we ever had; every error or blemish of the departed is effaced from our memories; and in vain would we recal a single instance of their ever having existed, in order to justify our own sins of omission or commission towards the dead. We can only remember their good qualities; their affection, numberless proofs of which now occur, to fill our hearts with deep but too late remorse; and, as we bend in agony over their pale remains, we feel that we would give worlds, were they ours to bestow, to bring back to life those whose deaths, in the blindness of our hearts, we had dared to contemplate as events that might occur without inflicting the thousandth

part of the anguish we now experience. The lapse of years seems forgotten. The indifference, or neglect, brought by time, or wrought by our own inconstancy; nay, even the faults that might have contributed to work such change, have all faded away. We remember only the days of happiness and undiminished affection; the days when the bare thought of losing the object would have been torture; and that torture is now ours, aggravated ten-fold by the reproaches of conscience, which tell us of our own unworthiness to possess the treasures we never before knew how to appreciate, and the loss of which we now vainly deplore. Oh! could we but value those dear ones, while yet Heaven vouchsafes to spare them, but half as dearly as we do when they are snatched from us for ever, what agonies of remorse might we not be saved! Could we but recal the past, and atone for any pain or wrong ever inflicted on the departed, what sacrifice would we not willingly, gladly offer up to accomplish it?—Our own past blindness of heart, seems now, when viewed through the tears of remorse, not

only a crime of deepest dye, but a folly, a madness, almost inconceivable! If even the good—those who have inflicted no injury, perpetrated no wrong, been guilty of no intentional act of unkindness—feel a remorse mingle with their regret for the loved dead, when they remember trivial instances of temper, caprice, or neglect, towards them, which, when they were in life, appeared but as trifles, unworthy a grave thought, what must be the pangs of those who are conscious of having embittered the lives of the departed by unkindness, ingratitude, and wrongs? Bitter, indeed, must their feelings be! nor can time heal the wound inflicted by remorse; for the mournful dead will often appeal to memory in the silence of night, chasing sleep from the pillow, and peace from the heart! X

Lord Almondbury for the first time of his life experienced the pangs of remorse, as he bent over the inanimate, but still lovely face of his departed wife. He recalled the blissful days that followed his marriage, when intoxicated by her beauty, charmed by her sweetness of temper, and vain of having secured a prize sought by so

many aspirants, he believed himself the happiest of mankind, and felt grateful to her who had preferred him. How fondly, how faithfully had she loved him; how uncomplainingly borne his neglect, his inconstancy, his harshness! And there she lay, done to death by his unkindness. Yes, the veil was torn from his eyes, and he could no longer conceal from himself that disappointment of the heart had led to the destruction of her health, and finally to her premature death. How calm, how beautiful she looked, and how touching was the angelic expression of her face! He threw himself on the bed by her side; his tears fell in abundance over the snowy drapery that covered her cold remains, and he pressed his lips again and again on that marble brow. He implored her pardon, execrated himself for having sinned against Heaven and her, and poured forth his late remorse, his words broken by sobs and groans that vouched for the depth and truth of it. How many instances of her unchanging love, patient sweetness, and constant forbearance, under wrongs and neglect that must

have aroused to anger and dislike any nature less perfect than hers, now occurred to his memory; *now*, when it was too late to make atonement for the wrongs she had endured. Yes, she had died unknowing the pangs her loss would inflict on him; her pure soul had fled to heaven, leaving him to drag on a miserable existence, poisoned by remorse and regret.

For many hours Lord Almondbury left not the chamber of death, and when at last he came forth from it, the waiting-woman of his deceased wife, who met him in the gallery, declared she never could have recognized his lordship, so great was the change wrought in his appearance by grief.

“Ah!” exclaimed she to Selina, “half the tenderness shown after death might have saved her from dying.”

CHAPTER IV.

A CELEBRATED sculptor was that day sent for by Lord Almondbury, to take a cast of the face, hands, and feet of the departed lady, for the purpose of having a recumbent statue of her executed for him. He remained present during the operation, had the form so enveloped in drapery that its proportions could not be seen, and evinced as much care and tenderness while the plaster was laid on and taken off, as if the dead could feel; he with his own hand removing the traces of it, and smoothing the pencilled brows and pale forehead, with all the watchful tenderness of love. The jealous care with which he prevented the drapery that covered the bust, arms, and legs from being removed, made a deep impression on the sculptor, who was often after-

wards heard to observe, that frequently as he had been employed on similar occasions, he had never seen such love and grief, as that witnessed in the case of Lord Almondbury. With his own hand he severed a long tress of beautiful hair from her head, and when her cold remains were to be placed in their last receptacle, to no other hands than his own would he confide the task. His agony, when the lid of the coffin was to be closed for ever, was not to be described. It was as though all the passionate love of the first days of his union with Lady Almondbury had revived in his heart to make him feel the pangs of this mortal separation more acutely. He accompanied the body to its last resting-place, overpowered by grief; and when he heard the earth fall on the coffin, he, the lately hardened libertine, fainted.

Lord Almondbury returned to his widowed home an altered man, and for some days was unable to leave his chamber.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Vernon, who had been summoned by Selina, had promptly repaired

to Almondbury House, and having attentively listened to the statement of her young friend, came to the conclusion that the conduct of Lord Almondbury towards her previous to his wife's death, rendered her residence in his house ineligible.

“You must return to my humble abode, my dear Miss Stratford,” said the excellent woman, “though I grieve you should be compelled to leave the dear child, who now, more than ever, will stand in need of a judicious and affectionate monitress.”

“I cannot bear to leave her to the care of servants,” said Selina, “and if possible I would wish to stay with her until I can see her placed in proper hands. But how is this to be effected? I feel the impropriety of my remaining here, without the sanction of the presence of some female friend; yet it looks so ungrateful to the dead, and so unkind to dear Lady Adelaide, to leave the house during the first shock of the sad event that has just occurred, that I know not what to do.”

“Make your mind easy on this point, my dear

Miss Stratford, *I* will remain here with you, and will write a few lines to inform my husband of my intention, and the cause that has led to it."

"But good, kind Mr. Vernon, will be so uncomfortable without you. It is not fair, indeed I feel it is not, to keep you from your home, when he will be so solitary and cheerless in your absence."

"Our servant is a steady and faithful woman, who knows his habits and tastes; she will see to his comforts, and with books, of which we have a goodly store, he will get through his evenings very well; and he will be so glad to have you back with us, though sorry for the cause, that your presence will repay him for the temporary loss of mine."

Selina made known to the housekeeper that her friend would sojourn a few days with her, and requested that a bedroom which communicated with her own, might be prepared for her. Mrs. Middleton, a worthy and respectable woman, perfectly comprehended and approved of the prudence of the measure. She was, as indeed

were all the servants of the establishment, but too well aware of the libertine habits of their lord and master, not to be fully sensible of the danger to which a young and handsome Governess would be exposed by being an inmate in his house, now that their loved and honoured lady was no more.

“Miss Stratford,” said she, to their late lady’s maid, “is a prudent, virtuous young woman, and her having that nice old gentlewoman to come here to keep her company, is a sure proof of it.”

The first step Lord Almondbury took when able to attend to business, was to order a splendid monument to be erected to the memory of his lamented wife, and the second was, to give instructions to his Solicitor to draw up a deed of annuity of a hundred guineas a-year for her life, to Miss Stratford. He felt that while fulfilling the requests of the departed, he was making the only atonement in his power to the dead, and he had a melancholy satisfaction in executing them to the letter. He now believed himself, what those around him gave him implicit credit for being, an altered man. His grief had

been so strong, that it, for the time, banished every sinful desire, every libertine thought from his breast, and he imagined that, henceforth, he should never more be the slave of his passions, the sensualist he had been. Great then was his regret, when he received a note from Selina, announcing her intention of resigning her situation in his family, as soon as a successor could be obtained to take charge of Lady Adelaide.

“This comes from my own folly and wickedness,” exclaimed he, as he let the note fall on the table near which he was seated, and pressed his hand to his forehead. “Madman, monster, that I was, when not even the presence of the angel I have lost, could prevent me from endeavouring to pollute her home, by attempting to corrupt the Governess of my child. Well may Miss Stratford dread remaining in my house after such atrocious conduct on my part. She knows not, she cannot know how I regret it, and would, in all probability, refuse credence to my assertions on the subject. That my daughter should be deprived of a mistress in whom her angelic mother placed such implicit

confidence, and all through my folly, my worse than folly, my guilty views, is indeed a severe, though well-merited punishment. I will write to Miss Stratford, will acknowledge my sin, avow my regret, and pledge myself in the most solemn manner never again to incur her displeasure, if she will only remain with my daughter."

The letter was written and despatched, and the whole tenour of it gratified Selina, by giving her the hope, that the writer was indeed an altered man, and would henceforth respect whoever might fill her place in his family. One of the points which most increased her sorrow in parting from her pupil was, the dread that no governess worthy of having the trust confided her, would remain in the house of Lord Almond-bury, unless she happened to be too old to excite improper feelings in his breast, and to elderly governesses, she had heard Lady Almond-bury say, he had an unconquerable objection. Her decision of withdrawing from his house, was not, however, to be changed; but while announcing this to his lordship in a cold

but polite note, she carefully avoided all recurrence to the past, and simply stated that she could not hold a situation in a house where no lady of the family presided.

“I thought it would be so,” said Lord Almondbury, as he laid the letter down. “When will the effects of my folly cease to pursue me! My poor Adelaide! how will this separation afflict her, so fondly attached too, as she is to Miss Stratford, who would have constantly kept alive in her breast the memory of her dear mother, and taught her to emulate the virtues and gentleness of that angelic being.”

Lord Almondbury wrote to a maiden aunt of his, requesting her to engage a governess for his daughter, and the result was, a pressing invitation, by return of post from her, for him and Lady Adelaide to join her at her seat in Yorkshire, where she would take charge of her grand-niece, until a suitable governess was provided.

The following day, Lord Almondbury inclosed Selina the deed of annuity, granted at the dying request of his wife, securing her one

hundred guineas per annum for her life, accompanied by a watch that had belonged to the deceased lady, and a medallion in gold, containing a lock of her hair, and that of her child, with a hundred pound note as a remuneration for her services. A letter couched in the most respectful terms, in which he dwelt on the high esteem in which she had been held by his deceased wife, and expressed his regret at her leaving his family, was sent with the deed of annuity, watch, and medallion.

Selina showed her friend, Mrs. Vernon, the letter, deed, and gift.

“It strikes me that it would not be right for me to accept the annuity,” said she; “I have not been sufficiently long in the house to have merited such a reward, and coming from one who insulted me, renders it much more repugnant to my feelings to accept it.”

“I confess I do not see it in the same point of view, my dear Miss Stratford. This annuity was granted at the request of Lady Almond-bury; and as such, is highly honourable to you. Had her ladyship bequeathed it by will,

you could have no scruple in receiving it; why, therefore, not accept this gift, granted at her dying request, as a testamentary bequest? Remember, it did not originate with Lord Almondbury; although I dare say he, in his altered frame of mind, is glad of being furnished with an opportunity of atoning for his former improper conduct. I really think you would not be justified in refusing a gift which is the result of your own merit, and the high sense entertained of it by the deceased lady."

"But coming from *his* hands, destroys its value in my eyes. I may be proud, wilful, and ungrateful, dear Mrs. Vernon, but I really cannot bring myself to accept the annuity."

"Do not at least decide, until you have consulted my husband. He will give you the best advice."

"Were it simply a matter of prudence, I would willingly defer to his judgment, and be guided by it; but this is an affair of feeling, and I must be guided by my own sense of right. I have no sentiment of anger against Lord Almondbury; but to receive an annuity from

one who twice insulted me by proposals of the basest nature, I cannot consent to do."

Mrs. Vernon forbore to interfere any further; and though thinking that Selina pushed her scrupulous delicacy further than was necessary, she admired the disinterestedness and self-respect that influenced her decision, and only regretted that it was not in her or her husband's power to secure independence to one so every way worthy of it. The return of the deed of annuity to Lord Almondbury gave him real pain. He felt that it was his former conduct that had led to the rejection of the gift, and this proof of the delicacy and self-respect of Selina, increased his regret that his daughter should be deprived of one so every way capable of instilling high principle and pure morals into her mind.

In ten days after, Lord Almondbury conducted Lady Adelaide to the country. The parting between that sensitive and affectionate child and her governess cost both many tears; and painful was it to Selina to listen to the

reiterated pleadings of her pupil to her dear Miss Stratford, not to leave her.

“ I will be so obedient, so good, if you will stay with me,” sobbed the weeping girl. “ It is so hard to lose my dear blessed mamma, and then for you, too, to leave me.”

Lord Almondbury wrote a second letter to Selina, intreating her by the affection she had entertained for the departed, not to reject the gift dictated by her dying breath, but nothing could change her decision; and the evening of the day that Lord Almondbury and his daughter left London, Selina and her kind friend Mrs. Vernon, returned to the home of the latter, where a most cordial welcome awaited them from Mr. Vernon.

“ I cannot,” said that worthy man, when his wife told him of Selina’s rejection of the annuity, “ blame Miss Stratford for her high-minded and disinterested conduct; although I could wish that the gift had been a bequest formally made by will, by her late amiable patroness, as in that form she could have accepted it without any scruple; but the con-

duct of Lord Almondbury, must have rendered it humiliating and painful to receive a gift coming through his hands, and, therefore, I can well understand her feelings in refusing it."

The death of Lady Almondbury, and the separation from her child, made so deep an impression on Selina, that it required all the kindness of her worthy host and hostess, to conquer the melancholy produced on her mind by these events. In a few days after her instalment in her peaceful abode, she read in a newspaper the departure of Lord Almondbury for the continent, and she wrote a few lines to the *femme de chambre* of his late wife, who now was appointed confidential attendant to her daughter, to enquire after the health of Lady Adelaide. It gave her pleasure to hear, by return of post, that her late pupil was in good health, and gradually recovering her spirits, under the care of her indulgent grand-aunt, with whom she was to remain until Lord Almondbury's return from the continent, which was not expected to be for some months.

And now Selina again turned her thoughts

to seeking a situation in some other family; she read over the advertisements for governesses, in which more accomplishments are required than can fall to the lot of mortal, and more virtues expected than poor human nature is heir to, and all for salaries little exceeding the wages bestowed on menials, without the reversionary left-off clothes they inherit. One advertisement, more reasonable in the requisites insisted upon, attracted her attention, and she answered it. In due time an appointment was made, and, accompanied by her kind friend Mrs. Vernon, she went to the place named. No sooner had she entered the sitting-room of a house in Brook-street, in which two ladies were seated, both having a certain asperity of countenance, joined to a striking resemblance of feature, that indicated a near relationship, than, having glanced at her, one of them observed in Italian, that her face was disagreeably associated in her mind, although she could not, at the moment, recollect where she had seen it. The other lady examined the countenance of Selina very much as a police magistrate may be

supposed to do that of a criminal brought before him on some serious charge ; but neither of the ladies motioned her to a seat, so she and Mrs. Vernon stood in painful embarrassment, near the door so lately entered.

“ Where have you last lived ? ” demanded one of the ladies in a stern tone of voice, that did not tend to encourage the timid girl, to whom the interrogation was addressed.

“ With the late Lady Almondbury.”

“ Ah ! yes ; now I recollect,” exclaimed the lady who had spoken in Italian, still using that language, “ this is the very person we saw walking with that odious *roué*, Lord Almondbury, one morning in Kensington Gardens.”

The lady to whom this remark was addressed, glanced at Selina with increased asperity, and asked why she had left Lord Almondbury’s family.

“ I left on the death of Lady Almondbury,” was the reply ; “ not wishing to continue.”

“ I should not have expected you to be so very scrupulous,” observed the other lady ; “ for, if I mistake not, I saw you walking with

his lordship some time ago, in Kensington Gardens."

This speech was uttered with so severe and contemptuous an air, as to bring blushes to the cheeks and brow of her to whom it was addressed, which being noticed, both ladies exchanged triumphant glances.

"Yes, madam, it is true, Lord Almondbury did one day join his daughter, Lady Adelaide, when I was walking with her in Kensington Gardens—"

"I will not trouble you any further; you would not at all suit me," rudely interrupted the lady; "but I beg to offer you one piece of advice, which is—to avoid, in whatever place you may enter, permitting gentlemen to walk with you."

There was something so insulting in the tone and manner in which this counsel was given, that Selina could not cheat herself into the belief that it was kindly meant, although convinced of its prudence. She, however, checked every symptom of the indignation she could not wholly vanquish, and explained how en-

tirely against her wish it had been that Lord Almondbury had joined her pupil and herself. But she spoke to those determined on disbelieving her assertions; for, giving her scarcely time to conclude her attempt to exculpate herself, she was told that her past, present, or future conduct was totally uninteresting to the speaker, and that she might withdraw.

Mrs. Vernon, who saw the malignity of this spiteful person, and felt anxious that Selina should not depart without removing, if, possible, the evil impression evidently made on her mind, ventured to address her.

“As the friend of Miss Stratford, I must state that she told me of the annoyance Lord Almondbury’s presence, with her pupil and herself, inflicted on her, on the sole occasion on which he joined them. You will therefore, I trust, madam, acquit her of any participation in that occurrence. Her refusing the liberal offer made to her to continue in the family after the death of the late amiable and excellent Lady Almondbury, is her best vindication.”

“I am not conscious of professing any charge

against the young person," said the sternest looking of the ladies; "and being particularly occupied just now, I have really no time to devote to the affairs of total strangers." And she coldly nodded her head, and rang the bell, leaving Selina, and her discomfited friend, no choice but to retire, hurt and grieved by the conviction that the two ladies, whom it had pleased fortune to bring them in contact with, entertained the most erroneous opinion of Selina, and would, in all probability, not scruple to express it to others when an occasion might offer.

Tears rushed to the eyes of Selina the moment the door of the house in Brook-street closed after her. Indignation and pride restrained them while in the presence of the two stern and ill-natured women who caused them to flow; but now they were no longer present to witness the pain they had inflicted, she could not repress her tears, although Mrs. Vernon used all her endeavours to soothe her wounded feelings. "To know that there are persons who believe me guilty of encouraging the atten-

tions of a married man, of being an unprincipled hypocrite, and of dishonouring the roof beneath which I was received as an instructress to the child of my dear, honoured Lady Almondbury. Oh! it is too, too cruel!" and the tears and sobs of Selina, as she lent her head on the shoulder of her kind companion, in the carriage into which they entered on leaving Brook-street, would have melted a sterner heart than belonged to the excellent Mrs. Vernon,

CHAPTER V.

WITH what intense dismay does a young and sensitive woman find herself suspected of conduct, from the bare notion of which she would shrink with horror and dread. Nor can the consciousness of her own innocence and purity console her under such a trial. She would fain have all, with whom she may chance to come in contact, believe in that virtue, on which even a doubt inflicts a wound not easily to be healed; and to bear, however unmerited, the suspicion of guilt, is torture.

“ Good heavens ! ” thought Selina, “ is there, then, no safety for the youthful and unprotected ? Can the wilful, bad conduct of a man, over whom I could exercise no control, entail on me such direful consequences ? They (referring to the ladies in Brook-street) not only scrupled not to insinuate a belief in my culpability, but refused to listen to aught in the

shape of my justification; and yet what could I have urged? I could but have told the simple truth; but how little would that have availed with them. [The bare acknowledgment that Lord Almondbury had addressed his libertine views to me, had presumed to insult my ears by his base proposals, would have led them to think that never would he have so dared, had not some levity on my part given him encouragement. How did I shrink from making the distressing avowal to my kind friend, Mrs. Vernon, though certain of her predisposition to judge favourably of me.]

Such were the reflections that occupied the mind of Selina, as she was driven through the streets, her waist encircled by the arm of her kind friend, who truly sympathized in her sorrow, and who uttered all that could alleviate her distress. “Those who could judge so harshly and unjustly, my dear Miss Stratford, must be ungenerous, and predisposed to evil. Do not allow their malice to make you unhappy. You will never again, in all human probability, encounter these persons; and pray

think no more of them," said the worthy woman. But the advice was more easily to be given than followed. Selina for many days could think of nothing else than that two women existed, of whom, until the hour she entered their house, she knew nothing, whom she never could have offended, yet who entertained towards her sentiments of a hostile nature, founded on a belief in conduct, on her part, which she would die rather than have merited.

How strange are the occurrences in life! A few hours before, had any one told her that, ere night, she should shed bitter tears, caused by persons she had never then seen, she would have disbelieved the possibility; yet here she now was, bowed down by indignation and wounded delicacy, at a charge rather hinted, than openly made, by total strangers, to whom she should never have an opportunity of vindicating her innocence. Proud as Selina naturally was, she would have submitted to almost any humiliation to exonerate her character, so highly did she estimate the blessing of an unspotted and unsuspected reputation.

When Mr. Vernon returned home in the evening, and noticed the traces of tears on the fair young face he had seen so blooming in the morning, his wife told him of the cause. "Poor dear young creature!" said the worthy man. "Were the ladies plain?"

"Yes; but what had that to do with their harshness?" replied his wife.

"More, much more, than you imagine, my dear. Ugly women, unless blessed with a greater portion of goodness than generally falls to the share of most in that predicament, are prone to judge severely of those who possess youth and beauty, two advantages which are always the objects of their envy. *They wished* to think ill of Miss Stratford, merely because she is young and handsome; had she been ill-favoured they would have judged her less uncharitably."

"And can such hardness of heart be?" demanded Mrs. Vernon.

"Yes," replied Mr. Vernon, "for jealousy and envy ever act on the heart as petrifying waters do on other substances. They harden it for ever."

Although rendered more timid than before, and painfully nervous at the thought of again presenting herself to strangers as a candidate to fill the place of governess, Selina felt that she must not eat the bread of idleness, or remain a tax on the hospitality of her kind friends. She carefully read over the long columns of advertisements in the "Times," in search of some one that might hold out a prospect of suiting her; but for some days this search was unsuccessful. There is something in an advertisement, a physiognomy, if I may be allowed so to express it, which, as the human countenance unveils the character of its owner, betrays that of the writer. From how many of those columns, filled up by specifications required, and headed by the word "*Wanted*," in large capitals, did Selina turn away disappointed and dispirited. One of the writers was, she felt certain, proud and austere; another, vulgar; a third mean and sordid; and all, more or less, exacting. She nevertheless blamed her own over fastidiousness; when reflection taught her that it was not for her

to expect to meet again such a patroness as the one of whom death had robbed her, and that she must not give way to the nervous dread she felt growing in her mind, but without loss of time, seek a situation. Once more she took up the newspaper, and selecting one of the advertisements that struck her as being the least objectionable, that is, in which least accomplishments and perfections were required, and salary not mentioned, addressed a letter to the initials and street named. This step taken, her thoughts reverted to the past, and thence came back to the present and future. What sort of family might this be into which she had offered to enter? How painful to seek a home with utter strangers, whose manners and minds might be so totally dissimilar to her own, that a daily contact with them would be anything but agreeable. Yet such must ever be the lot of a governess, who is expected to bestow not only her accomplishments, and the fruits of her education on those she is paid for instructing, but also to mould her manners, if not her

sentiments, to suit those of the parents whose hardly-earned bread she is to eat, and whose sordid remuneration of her services she is expected to be thankful for. The more she reflected on this subject, the less courage did she feel for a new trial, and yet it must be made. She must meet cold looks, answer stern questions, and submit to be treated rather as a criminal before her judge, than a well-educated and stainless woman, seeking a maintenance by the exercise of her abilities in an honourable calling.

Again she went forth; but this time she directed her steps to no aristocratic street. The answer to her note appointed her to call at ten o'clock the following day at No. —, Allsop Terrace, New Road. A boy about eleven or twelve years old, opened the door, and having inquired whether she was the person come after "the governess's place," gave her ingress. Clothed in a faded suit of green cloth made in the form of a close vest and trousers, the jacket ornamented with three rows of brass sugar-loaf buttons, which had long lost

their lustre, this boy, designed by his employers to represent that appendage of an expensive establishment, denominated a page, was, in reality, the only male domestic in the house. His whole appearance bore evidence to this fact; for his face looked as if water seldom came in contact with it; his hair was in a disorder more calculated for picturesque effect, than tidiness or good order; his black neck-cloth had grown into a reddish brown, and his boots were pierced in various places. An extreme obliquity of vision increased the natural ugliness of this youth, and a sharpness of manner amounting to impertinence, testified that good breeding was not much attended to in the house in which he fulfilled the multifarious duties of porter, butler, footman and errand-boy.

“Missis is up stairs, and if you follow me I’ll show you the way to her,” said the youth of all-work, rapidly mounting the stairs at the other side of the hall. He ascended so nimbly, that Selina found it impossible to keep pace with him, though she toiled up the narrow and

steep stairs as quickly as she could, as her panting breath testified.

“Come along, miss, come along,” said the elfin page, “missis can’t abide slow people;” and before Selina had reached the landing-place, he threw open the door of a room which opened on it, and elevating his voice, exclaimed—“If you please, ma’am, here be the person as is comed after the governess’s place.”

“Why does’nt she come in?” said a gruff and most disagreeable voice, in return.

“She ha’nt got up the stairs yet,” was the reply.

“Then why keep the door open, you fool? except to give me my death by cold.”

The boy muttered an unintelligible reply, and Selina entered the dining-room:—seated by a table covered with various pieces of linen, divers pairs of stockings, some children’s frocks, and muslin habit-shirts, forming altogether a heterogeneous and formidable heap of litter, was a woman about forty years of age, whose dress denoted that little care had been devoted to it. This personage had once been a *blonde*,

with pretensions to beauty, and the flaxen hair which fell in long ringlets over the cheeks, even down to her large bust, rendered the complexion peculiar to very fair women, when arrived at a certain age, still more remarkable. A red circle occupied the place of eyebrows, while the scanty eye-lashes, “few and far between,” were nearly white, and lent a very disagreeable expression to the light grey eyes beneath them, which peered with almost feline slyness on the face of Selina. “You are Y. Z. I suppose?” said the mistress of the house, “and I am F. G. Sit down, for I have many questions to ask, and they will take some time to be answered, for one can’t be too cautious now-a-days, when so many impostors are going about, who one lets enter one’s house. Who is this person?” enquired the speaker, rudely pointing to Mrs. Vernon.

“The friend with whom I reside, Madam.”

“You had better sit down also,” said F. G., for the real name of the lady had not yet been revealed, and she nodded to a chair, placed with a row of others formally against the wall of the room.

“You undertake to teach French, Italian, German, and all other languages, I suppose?” demanded F. G.

“No, madam, not German,” was the reply.

“And why not pray? you might as well have learnt that, when you were learning other languages.”

No reply being made to this observation, the lady again resumed her category. “You can draw, and paint, of course, and do every kind of needle-work?”

“I draw tolerably,” was the modest answer.

“But can’t you paint in oil? that I consider indispensable, for I want to have pictures for my room. I like pictures, and those you will paint while teaching my daughters, could be hung up, for as I will have to pay for the canvass, colours, and for your time, I will naturally expect that the pictures are to be mine.”

“I am sorry that I do not paint in oil.”

“Well, for a governess setting up to teach every thing, I think it’s very strange that you shouldn’t be able to paint in oil, or to teach

German. This must of course make a considerable difference in your salary. I hope you perfectly understand plain work, and can do it quickly, for I expect all the children's clothes to be kept in repair, as well as made by their governess, as also that she will lend a hand to mending the house linen, and altering my dresses."

Mrs. Vernon looked at Selina in a mode to imply her desire, that her young friend should at once decline the situation, where so much was required, and so little comfort could be expected; but, prepared to find objections present themselves in every family where she might offer her services, and anxious not to continue to be a burden on the kind friends she was staying with, Selina determined, if possible, to close with the terms of F. G., and by patience and zeal in fulfilling the duties of her office, render it at least supportable.

"What salary do you expect?" enquired F. G.

"Sixty guineas a-year, madam."

"Sixty guineas a-year!" reiterated the mis-

tress of the house, letting her work drop into her lap, and raising her hands to mark her astonishment at so enormous a sum being expected. “Well, I never heard of such a salary being asked, and that too, by a person who acknowledges that she doesn’t know German, and can’t paint in oils. Fifty pounds a-year—*mind*, pounds, *not* guineas—is the utmost I intend to give, even to a person who will undertake to teach German and painting in oil, two indispensable requisites in my opinion, in the education of young ladies. If you are disposed to accept forty pounds a-year, I deduct ten on account of your not knowing German and oil-painting, I have no objection to your entering my family.”

Again Mrs. Vernon looked at Selina, and expressed, as strongly as looks could do, her desire that she should decline the situation; but her young friend, to her surprise and regret, accepted it, and it was agreed that she should enter on her new duties the following week.

“And now,” said the lady, who had announced that her name was Mrs. Jefferson, “to whom

am I to refer for your abilities and character?"

"I have a strong recommendation from the only situation I ever held, and which I left in consequence of the death of the lady."

"But her children, your pupils, didn't also die, I suppose," observed Mrs. Jefferson sharply. "Why didn't you continue with them?"

"I declined doing so, Madam, because I did not wish to live in a house where no lady presided."

"You acted very properly. And so the recommendation you have is from the gentleman, the widower?"

"Yes, Madam."

"I would prefer a recommendation from a lady."

"I can answer for the morals, and conduct of Miss Stratford, Madam," said Mrs. Vernon.

"What relation are you to her, pray?"

"None whatever, Madam, but I know her well, and can conscientiously recommend her."

"But as you are a perfect stranger to me, you cannot be surprised if I ask you for a reference."

“The clergyman of the parish in which I have resided thirty-five years, will, I am sure, madam, satisfy you with regard to my respectability ; and if you permit me, I will write his address on my card.”

“Yes, that will do very well, you’ll find pen and ink on that table ;” and Mrs. Jefferson pointed to a table near the window, which Mrs. Vernon approached, and wrote the address on.

“Be sure to be here early on Monday morning, Miss—what did you say your name is?”

“Stratford, Madam.”

“Stratford! any relation to the family of that name in Norfolk?”

“No, Madam.”

“I thought not, and I’m glad of it ; for they are a proud, haughty set. You may go now ; but remember Monday morning. I like punctuality, and expect to find it in every one in my establishment ;” and, nodding her head, she motioned to the door, as a signal for the departure of her visitors, who took their leave.

“How could you, my dear Miss Stratford, engage with a woman whose appearance and

manners offer so little promise of comfort in her house, and on terms, too, so very disadvantageous?" asked Mrs. Vernon, almost in a reproachful tone.

"I must confess that the abode does not seem very tempting," replied Selina; "but still it is less disagreeable to me to close at once even with this engagement, unpromising as it is, than have to go to other houses, and be subjected to the annoyances always attending such occasions."

The inquiries of Mrs. Jefferson having been satisfactorily answered by the clergyman, to whom they were addressed, Selina, on the appointed day, much to the regret of her kind host and hostess, bade farewell to them, and proceeded to her new abode.

"Remember, my dear Miss Stratford," said both husband and wife, "that should our fears, as to the comfort of the situation you have accepted, be realized, you have always a home here to which you will ever be cordially welcomed, and where your presence will ever diffuse joy."

These proofs of a friendship so valuable, were most soothing to the feelings of her to whom they were offered, and armed her with courage to support whatever annoyances she might have to encounter in the family she was about to enter.

“You are later than I expected,” were the first words addressed to her by Mrs. Jefferson on her arrival. “As you are so late, you have, of course, had your luncheon; so, while we are eating ours, you can go and arrange your things in your room. Thomas, Thomas, why don’t you answer when you are called?”

“Vy, Ma’am, I vas a getting the luncheon, and I can’t be in two places at vunce.”

“Haven’t I told you a dozen times that you must not make answers! Its very vulgar.”

“Then, vat’s I to do ven you axes me questions, ma’am?”

“There, go along, you stupid lout; and send Kitty to show Miss Stratford her room, and you must help her up with her luggage.”

Thomas stopped at the top of the kitchen-stairs, and screamed as loud as he could for

Kitty, who, after a few calls, was heard ascending from the lower regions, muttering her dissatisfaction *soto voce*.

“One never can have a moment’s quiet, nor a meal in peace,” muttered Kitty. “I wish I was back in my last place, I am sure. *That was* something like a place, where there was a reg’lar footman kept, as well as a teaboy.”

“Missis says you are to show the new governess to her room, and that I am to help you to carry up her traps.”

“How am I to help to carry up such a big trunk as that there, I should like to know? why it would strain my back. I think people might have some conscience and pity for poor servants, instead of having trunks that would take a couple of porters to move about,” observed Kitty, glancing angrily at Selina, who, slipping a shilling into her hand, and another into that of the boy, soon vanquished the objections of both to perform the service she required, and rendered them very civil.

“Sure, Thomas, it’s nothing after all,” said Kitty, lifting the trunk with perfect ease.

“Follow me, Miss, if you please; take care of the turn, for the stairs are mighty narrow at the corner.”

On the third floor, Kitty and the boy entered a small room, so utterly destitute of all comfort, that Selina, whose expectations were very moderate, drew back involuntarily, as she cast her eyes over the wretched room.

“You may well stare, Miss,” said Kitty; “for this is no fit room for a genteel young lady like you. It was very well for the last governess, who was no more a lady than I am, and who never showed us the colour of her money while she was in the house; but for you, Miss, who have behaved so genteel, I’m quite ashamed to put you into such a hole.”

“Von’t you have a bit of summat to eat, Miss?” asked Thomas.

“Do, Miss,” added Kitty, “I advise you; for if missis *can* cheat you out of your reglar meals she *will*, I can assure you. I know she half-starved the governess that was here last.”

“Thomas, Thomas,—Kitty, Kitty, what are you about?” screamed Mrs. Jefferson.

“Coming, Ma’am,—coming,” answered both servants, as they rapidly retreated from the chamber of Selina, and descended the stairs.

Selina glanced around the miserable chamber assigned to her, with a shudder of disgust she could not conquer. So low, that she could hardly stand upright in it, and only lighted by one small window, nothing could be more dreary and dingy than the aspect of this room. The paper hung from the humid wall in several places, and so defaced was the pattern and colours by damp, that it would be difficult to guess the original design or hue. The small window had no curtain, and in that point perfectly corresponded with the bed, which, with its soiled counterpane, scarcely covering the still more soiled blankets and mattresses, offered anything but a tempting place of repose. A broken mirror, of small dimensions, stood on a deal table, and a cracked jug and basin filled a rickety wash-hand stand. Such was the dormitory assigned to the governess,—a chamber that would, in most respectable families, be considered too bad for a servant holding one of

the lowest situations in the kitchen. It boded little of good to its new occupant, who, determined however to make the best of it, immediately set about arranging her clothes and books,—no easy task, a very small wooden chest of drawers on three legs being the only piece of furniture in the room to receive them. In about an hour she was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Jefferson, who, with two very plain girls of nine and eight years old, she presented to Miss Stratford as her pupils. They had very red hair, and one squinted exceedingly; a misfortune, as their mother stated, to be attributed solely to Julia's imitating that infirmity in Thomas the page.

“Matilda you will find a very docile pupil,” said Mrs. Jefferson. “Indeed she is, if anything, too quiet, while Julia is extremely lively. This is the school-room.”

An apartment little larger than a closet, lighted by a window in the roof, and heated by a small stove, which the discoloured paper on the walls proved to smoke, was the wretched den where Selina and her pupils were to pass the days.

“You will dine with me when I have no company,” said Mrs. Jefferson, assuming a dignified air, “and when I have, you will be expected to play and sing to amuse the party.”

While the mother was speaking, both the little girls were closely examining the countenance of their new governess; the elder one with a stupid stare of wonder, and the younger with a cool effrontery, with which no inconsiderable portion of slyness and cunning were mingled.

“Look, mamma,” exclaimed she, “what a pretty gown Miss Stratford has, and what a nice collar and cuffs; why she is much smarter than you are, mamma.”

“Hold your tongue, child! Have I not told you that you are not to make personal remarks?”

“But you said at lunch that she was much too smartly dressed, and that her gown was better than yours.”

Mrs. Jefferson’s face flushed with anger, and she again told Miss Julia to be silent, adding a denial of the child’s assertion. This, however,

was not the mode to silence the young lady, who, anxious to establish her own veracity, pertinaciously adhered to her statement, adding,

“Yes, mamma, you *did* say Miss Stratford’s gown was better than yours, and also, that governesses had no business to be better dressed than ladies.”

“You really are incorrigible, and merit a good box on the ear, you little tiresome thing,” said Mrs. Jefferson, now crimson with rage. Miss Julia, nothing daunted, was on the point of again vindicating her own veracity, when Selina interposed, and told her to be silent.

“What, when mamma tells stories, and denies what she said? Matilda heard her as well as I did, didn’t you, Matilda?”

Matilda looked more stupid than before, and after a moment’s pause, observed that she never remembered any thing that was said.

“That’s because you are a stupid fool, as mamma often says,” replied the spoilt Julia.

“Every one calls me stupid,” said Matilda, “but I can’t help it,” and here the poor girl burst into tears.

“See, you naughty girl, how you have made your poor sister cry. You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” said Mrs. Jefferson.

“I only repeated what you continually say,” replied Julia, addressing herself to her mother, who, dreading a continuation of her impertinence, left the room, recommending, before she closed the door, that Miss Stratford should severely correct her for insubordination.

To the grave lecture pronounced by Selina, her hopeful pupil listened with little more deference than she had evinced towards the reproofs of her mother. She attempted several times to interrupt the discourse of her governess by rude observations, and by her waywardness and obstinacy convinced her teacher, that to subdue so wilful a temper, and reduce her to obedience, would be indeed no easy task. While the grave reproof was being given, Miss Jefferson sat with a vacant stare, that indicated how little she comprehended its import, and when at last appealed to by Selina, whether she did not think her younger sister’s conduct very blameable? she replied,

"I don't know, miss. I didn't know it was wrong of Julia to repeat what mamma said. Our governess who went away said we must never tell a lie, and yet mamma and you are very angry that sister spoke the truth. I'm sure I don't know who is right, nor who is wrong, do I Julia?"

"No, to be sure you don't, poor Matty. How should you. You know every one says you are a fool."

"Hi, hi, hi," sobbed Matilda, "Julia is always calling me a fool, and I don't like being called a fool, hi, hi, hi, and I *won't* be called a fool, that I won't."

"Miss Julia, it is highly improper of you to speak so rudely to your sister. I won't permit it," observed Selina gravely.

"But she *is* a fool," retorted the incorrigible Julia, "and as I only said the truth, I think you are very cross and ill-natured to scold me."

"Where are your books, young ladies?" inquired Selina.

"They are all torn to pieces," replied Matilda, "I saw Julia tear them up yesterday."

“You helped me, Matty, you know you did.”

“Because you said I must tear them with you, and then we should have no more lessons to learn.”

“Then I must inform your mother, young ladies,” and Selina left the room to acquaint Mrs. Jefferson of the fact revealed by that lady’s eldest daughter. This new proof of the bad conduct of her children produced great anger on the part of the mother, who far from attributing their errors to their true source, namely, her own improper indulgence to the younger, proclaimed herself to be the most unfortunate parent in the world to have such troublesome, ill-behaved girls. Having pronounced strong censure on them, mingled with many laudations on her own goodness, she inquired if Miss Stratford had not any books that might replace those destroyed the previous day. Being told she had not, Mrs. Jefferson said, “Well, then, put down on paper the books you require, but let them be as few as possible, and to-morrow I will go out to a book stall, and see if I can’t buy some cheap ;

and in the mean time, that you should not be idle, here's some linen to mend, and while you are at work, you can scold the children, which will do them good. Always utilise your time as I do, for while I work, my eyes and fingers only being employed, I can use my tongue, and always take that opportunity to scold the children and servants."

CHAPTER VI.

UNWILLING that her pupils should pass the day in idleness, Selina proposed giving them some needle-work, but found that great an adept as was their mother in this homely but useful art, they were wholly ignorant of even the most simple part of it, and nay, more, evinced a positive disinclination to learn it. they commenced whispering and laughing together; Miss Julia making it evident, by her repeated glances at her governess, that *she* furnished the subject of her mirth, and when told to be silent, stoutly defended her right to speak. Selina looked around for a book, in order to employ her wayward pupil in reading aloud, but none was to be found; and when adopting their mother's advice to correct them, she firmly but calmly reproved them for their rude-

ness, Miss Julia commenced making the most fearful grimaces at her, which set Miss Jefferson into screams of laughter. Heavily and gloomily passed that long day. It seemed interminable to the poor governess; but at length she was summoned to dinner, and the maid-servant who gave her the intimation that the repast was served in the dining-room, acquainted her that she was expected to smoothe the young ladies' hair, wash their faces and hands, and see that they were tidy.

“ But mind Miss, if you please, you mustn't keep missis waiting for a moment, for she's mighty pertiklar about having people ready for dinner, and makes sich an ado about it, that it's quite vexing to hear how she'll go on sometimes.”

Selina, greatly flurried by this intelligence, endeavoured to make her pupils a little more presentable for the dining-room, to which operation on her part they were strongly opposed, and offered such resistance, that fifteen minutes were occupied in what might have been accomplished in half that time, and having merely

snatched a moment to wash her own hands, she hurried to the dining-room.

“This will never do, I can assure you,” said Mrs. Jefferson, her mouth so filled with food that her utterance was nearly impeded, and her face extremely flushed. Mr. Jefferson, for so Selina concluded the gentleman at the bottom of the table to be, betrayed no symptom of recognizing her presence, except by raising his eyes from his plate, and staring rudely at her, while he continued to eat his dinner with an appetite that a *gourmand* might envy, however he might despise the coarse fare that satisfied it. A soiled table-cloth, bearing sundry proofs of the partiality of its owners to mustard, and of their carelessness in helping gravy, was covered by delf plates and dishes of the commonest kind. At the top of the table was a dish of very greasy looking hash, in which onions formed a component part, and at the bottom was a boiled breast of mutton so covered with fat as to vouch for the skill in feeding of the seller. A dish of mashed turnips of so dark a hue as to leave no doubt that the place of

milk had been supplied by water in their culinary preparation, was flanked by a dish of potatoes on which steam had done its worst, leaving only certain crushed and clammy substances adhering to the dish, whence it was no easy task to remove them.

“Cut some mutton for the children,” said Mrs. Jefferson to her *caro sposo*. “You need not give them much, for they ate a good luncheon.”

“I had only some cold pork, and it was so nasty I couldn’t eat it,” observed Miss Julia, putting up her lip, and pouting.

“And I had only a potatoe,” said Miss Jefferson, with a very doleful expression of countenance.

“No one wants to know what you have had,” replied the affectionate father, gruffly; “but I know by my butcher’s bills that a little does not satisfy you.”

“I want some hash, I can’t eat that nasty fat mutton,” whined Miss Julia.

“Then go without,” was the rejoinder of her papa.

“Give Miss Stratford some mutton,” said Mrs. Jefferson, helping herself at the same time to a large supply of the hash, which, whether by accident or design, she never offered Selina, who, thoroughly disgusted with the appearance of the whole dinner, was strongly tempted to decline accepting the offered slice of fat mutton. She feared, however, that if she did so, she might give offence, and be accused of being over dainty ; so she tried to find some portion of lean amid the mass of fat, and not discovering any, quietly abstained from eating, contenting herself with a morsel of the very small piece of coarse bread placed by her plate.

“ You should have said you were not hungry, and not have allowed yourself to be helped to a large slice of mutton,” observed her uncivilized hostess. “ It is very extravagant and wasteful, and those who have to earn their bread *ought* to know better.”

“ The mutton is rather too fat,” said Mr. Jefferson, casting an admiring glance on the fair face of the governess, whose beauty began to thaw the ice around his heart.

The glance was not lost on his watchful wife, although it had wholly escaped the notice of her to whom it was directed, and growing red with anger, she asserted "that the mutton was not at all too fat, and she wondered how *some* people could be so foolish as to encourage the false delicacy of *other* people," looking, as she spoke, first at her husband, and then at Selina.

"Give me some porter, and mind you froth it well," said Mrs. Jefferson. The boy did as he was told, and then, unbidden, was about to pour some porter into the glass of Selina, when his mistress exclaimed—"Stop, stop, what are you about? Don't you know that the governesses never have porter or beer?"

The boy's face revealed that even *he* was shocked at the sordidness of his mistress, and Mr. Jefferson, little used as he was to interfere in the domestic arrangements of his wife, ventured to say, "that, as Miss Stratford had so little dinner, perhaps she might like a little porter."

Rage sparkled in the small eyes of the hostess,

who, suspecting the cause of this extraordinary liberality on the part of her spouse, observed, that “if Miss Stratford chose to go without her dinner, that was *her* affair; and she thought, for her part, that malt-liquor was very improper for young women, and was only fit for those who had the cares of a family on their hands.”

Selina assured her “that water was her usual beverage, and that she preferred it to all others;” but the blush that rose to her cheek, while uttering this truth, increased the attraction of her countenance so much, that Mrs. Jefferson, again detecting the truant eyes of her husband fixed on it, angrily declared “*she* cared not whether water was, or was not, the preferred beverage of her governess, but that, for her part, no governess, however *some* people might admire her, should have malt-liquor in her house.”

Mr. Jefferson seemed astonished at this open display of the pervading weakness of his wife, and Miss Julia, who saw that her mother was angry, with greater *naïveté* than tact, observed,

“ Lawk, how funny ! Mamma was very angry with Thomas for offering to help the governess to porter ; and now, she is more angry, because Miss Stratford said she would not like to drink any thing but water.”

“ Hold your tongue, you little stupid creature !” replied Mrs. Jefferson ; “ there really is no bearing that chatter-box.”

“ Yes, I must say Julia is much too flippant,” observed Mr. Jefferson ; “ but now that she has got a good governess,” and he looked very graciously at Selina, “ I doubt not she will soon improve.”

“ And pray, Mr. Jefferson, how do you know whether she has a good governess or not, I should like to know ?” said his angry wife. “ You never saw Miss Stratford before half an hour ago, yet you instantly take for granted that she must be a good governess forthwith.”

“ I concluded, my dear,” replied the hen-pecked husband, “ that, with your sagacity and powers of discrimination, you would not engage any one who was not fully capable of the task undertaken.”

“ No, Mr. Jefferson ; it was no such thing ; I know you better, and am not to be imposed on by your hypocritical speeches. You judged Miss Stratford so mighty favourably, merely because she happens to have what you men call a pretty face.”

“ Well, my dear ; don’t you know that the phrase goes, that ‘ a handsome face is the best letter of recommendation ? ’ ”

“ Handsome face, Mr. Jefferson ! You ought to be ashamed of yourself—that’s what you ought ! and before your children too ! Take the children away, Miss Stratford ; I wonder you waited to be told to do so ! ” and the speaker’s face became crimson with anger. “ A little sense or delicacy might have taught you the impropriety of allowing your pupils to remain present, while their father addressed such improper language to you, and in presence of their ill-used mother, too.”

Selina was struck dumb by this unexpected rebuke ; she felt how insulting it was, and wished to disclaim every part in the dispute ; but, too much hurt to be able to speak with the

coolness and self-possession befitting such an occasion, she arose, and, making a sign to her pupils to follow, left the room,—the loud voice of Mrs. Jefferson, in violent anger, reaching her ears even in the school-room.

“I’m so glad,” said Miss Julia, clapping her hands; “papa will get a good trimming now, I’m sure. What a rage mamma was in! I hope she’ll give papa a good dressing—that’s what I do! for he took her part against me, when she called me a chatter-box.”

“Hold your tongue, Miss Julia,” said her governess.

“Is this the way?” demanded the incorrigible girl, applying her finger and thumb to her tongue, which vulgar pleasantry set her elder sister into shouts of laughter.

“No, Miss; it is not the way. Take your hand from your mouth, and remain silent.”

“There’s no pleasing you, I see,” replied the spoilt child; “you told me to hold my tongue, and when I hold it you find fault with me. How should I hold it, except with my hand, I should like to know?”

“If you speak again I will punish you.”

When Selina was summoned to tea, she found Mrs. Jefferson alone; but the calm now observable in her countenance betrayed that it was the lull that follows a storm; and that the storm had been a violent one she could not doubt, from the traces it had left behind.

“I am to have company to-morrow evening,” said she; “and wish you to put some trimming on my dress, and also to make me a turban out of this scarf;” and the lady held up a very tarnished tinsel scarf, more fit to figure among the finery of the sweeps on May-day, than on the head of any one with pretensions to gentility.

“I do not at all understand millinery, Madam, and never attempted to make a head-dress in my life.”

“Well, then, the sooner you begin the better. You must do it as well as you can, that’s all, I’m not very particular.”

“I am really afraid, Madam, that I cannot execute the task to your satisfaction.”

“Not if you make up your mind before hand to do it carelessly, as I see you have.”

Selina took the scarf, determined to fashion it into a turban as well as she could, and then Mrs. Jefferson intimated her desire, that she should be prepared to exert her talents to amuse the expected company.

“You must be in good voice,” added Mrs. Jefferson, “for there is nothing I detest so much, as persons who, when they are asked to play and sing, begin preluding over the keys of the piano-forte, and clearing their throats.”

“This last operation is, however, sometimes unavoidable, Madam,” replied Selina, “the nerves often compel it.”

“Why, what can the nerves have to do with the throat, or voice, I should like to know?” demanded Mrs. Jefferson.

“They exert considerable influence over both, I believe,” observed Selina.

“Stuff, nonsense. You may as well assert that my nerves could prevent my speaking if I have a mind to talk, as that your’s could prevent you singing if you were disposed to do so. Let me hear no more about nerves, if you wish to continue in my family, for I consider nerves

as another name for idleness and affectation, and greatly dislike all persons who urge them as an excuse for the nonperformance of the duties they are expected to fulfil. Pour out the tea," said Mrs. Jefferson, "and cut me some thin slices off the French roll, with butter from the small pat. If you like to have anything to eat, there is some excellent brown bread and salt butter, which I recommend you. Brown bread does not agree with me, otherwise I prefer it."

The stale loaf did not tempt the appetite of Selina, and she thought that Mrs. Jefferson appeared pleased with her abstemiousness."

"You are a little eater, I see," said that lady, "and you are right; nothing conduces to health more than a spare diet. Half the ailments to which people are subject, are occasioned by repletion."

How strange, thought Selina, that her practice should so wholly differ from her theory; for while speaking, Mrs. Jefferson was devouring the bread and butter cut for her, as greedily as if she had not eaten a very hearty dinner.

"I wonder you take sugar and milk in your

tea," observed Mrs. Jefferson; "both are now proved to be unwholesome, and I know many people who have left them off. Young women ought to do so before habit has rendered either necessary, and more especially those who have to earn their bread. If, however, you can't dispense with sugar, I will have some moist for your use, for loaf sugar is now so dear that no one in my house, except Mr. Jefferson and myself, indulge in it."

This hint effectually prevented Selina from taking a second cup of tea, and her hostess having observed that she was unemployed, recommended her to resume her needle.

"I can't bear seeing people sitting idle," said she, "and never was there a truer line than that which says—

'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.'

Suppose you begin to make the turban—here are some pins, with the aid of which you can get it into shape, and I can try it on. If it becomes me, you can stitch it together afterwards."

"I shall require a form for it, Madam."

“Have you nothing among your own things that would make a form?”

“Nothing whatever, Madam.”

“Ring the bell then, and I’ll send out Thomas to a shop round the corner.”

Thomas made his appearance, and was told by his mistress “that he must run to the aforesaid shop, and buy her half-a-yard of catgut, a yard of ribbon wire, and,” she added, “tell Mrs. Dobson it is to make a turban; and be sure you beat down the price.”

“Vy, Ma’am, she as good as turned me out of the shop the last time I vent there, for offering her as you told me to do—half what she asked.”

Thomas returned in due time, and laid his purchases with the bill on the table.

“What an extravagant charge,” said his mistress, examining the items; “Mrs. Dobson does not really know what to demand. Here’s eightpence to pay; but if you had not been a stupid, as well as an extravagant fellow, you might have got it for half the money.”

“I said all I could to her, Ma’am. I told her ’twas to dish up a turbot for company to-morrow,

and she laughed and said, as how she never heard of catgut or ribbon wire being wanted for a turbot before."

"Was there ever such a fool?" exclaimed his angry mistress.

"If I vosn't a 'prentice, I know vhat I'd do," muttered Thomas, "for it's no manner of use trying to give satisfaction!"

"Leave the room instantly, you saucy fool. How dare you be so impudent!"

The lad withdrew, slamming the door violently after him, which act of insubordination led to Mrs. Jefferson's giving a long detail of the unkindness, ingratitude, and baseness of servants in general, but of Thomas in particular, while Selina plied her fingers in the formation of the turban.

The next day was a busy one in the house. The noise of preparation commenced at an early hour. The voice of Mrs. Jefferson might be heard in angry debate with Kitty, Thomas, and a charwoman, called in on company days; and Mr. Jefferson, so seldom seen, except at meals, kept coming in and going out several times,

each of his visits occasioning an increased commotion in the lower regions. "There, just like you, Mr. Jefferson," said his angry wife. "Who but you would have bought such expensive fish?"

"I assure you I got it very cheap, my dear."

"What do you call cheap, I should like to know?"

"I only gave two shillings for the two pair of soles."

"Ninepence a pair would have been plenty."

"Really, my dear, I can't lose half an hour higgling about sixpence."

"Your time is so vastly precious, I suppose. And what did you pay for the chickens?"

"Three shillings a couple. You can't call that dear, I'm sure?"

"You might have got them for half-a-crown, for they're none of the freshest, I can tell you."

"You expect things for nothing, my dear; ay, and good things too."

"No, Mr. Jefferson, I do no such thing, I only expect the value of my money. Have

you put the bottle of gooseberry wine into cold water? You might have persuaded the fish-monger to have thrown you in fourpence worth of ice, which would have made the gooseberry wine pass perfectly for Champagne; but you have no thought or cleverness in those matters, and everything falls on my shoulders. Mind you put a little brandy, and a squeeze of a lemon, into a couple of the bottles of Cape Madeira, and have the Sherry label put on them, and the Madeira label on the plain. Don't keep pressing people to drink wine, Mr. Jefferson; it's a vulgar, as well as an extravagant habit. The only one to be pressed is a certain person;" and she looked mysteriously at her husband, and then in the direction of the servants, to explain why she did not name the individual to whom she did not grudge the wine. "It's a different thing with regard to *her*," resumed Mrs. Jefferson; "for, if we play our cards as we ought, *she* will leave us the means to enjoy ourselves for the rest of our lives."

The dinner served to Selina and her pupils on that day was so scanty in quantity, and so

bad in quality, that Miss Julia protested loudly against their being put off with such bad fare. Mrs. Jefferson had arranged that Miss Stratford and her pupils should be in the drawing-room when the ladies retired there from the dining-room, and that Selina was to preside at the tea-table. "But, mind," added that prudent woman, "you don't let Matilda or Julia eat any of the cakes; I have bought only enough for the company: and don't let the candles be lighted until you hear us on the stairs, for it's no use having them flaring in the room for nothing."

The scanty dinner served to Selina and her pupils had rendered these last so ravenous, that great was the difficulty she experienced in preventing them from seizing and devouring the cakes laid on the tea-table. Miss Julia repeatedly attempted to snatch them, and endeavoured to induce her sister to join in the attack, declaring aloud, that "if Matty was not such a fool, she might possess herself of the cakes while Miss Stratford was occupied in keeping *her* from them."

CHAPTER VII.

AT length the ladies entered the drawing-room with flushed faces, and considerable animation of manner. "What an excellent dinner we have had, my dear Mrs. Jefferson," said one of them.

"Mrs. Jefferson's dinners are always good," observed another. "You must have a very superior cook."

"I am glad you think so, Mrs. Willcocks; but I assure you that even the best cooks are not to be trusted. I superintend all the made dishes myself."

"And you are quite right; there is nothing like the eye of a mistress," observed a very fat lady, dressed in a green gown and red turban.

"I thought your wine remarkably good," said another of the visitants, "particularly the Sherry and Champagne; and I am a very good

judge, I can tell you:" and a great consumer, too, might, without much chance of any breach of veracity, be added, if the conclusion might be drawn from the flushed face, loud voice, and unsteady gait of the speaker.

"I am so glad *you* liked the wine, my dear friend," replied Mrs. Jefferson, with her most insinuating smile. "I told Mr. Jefferson that he must provide the very best, for that you could not drink any other."

"So here are the young ladies," observed the lady, to whom it was evident Mrs. Jefferson attached the most importance.

"Matty, Julia, why do you not go up to your dear, kind friend, and kiss her directly?" said their mother.

But while the girls approached to perform their mamma's wishes, the person they were commanded to embrace stood motionless, staring rudely at Selina, who instantly recognised Mrs. Forsythe.

"Why, Lord bless me! how long have *you* been here?" demanded she, with an authoritative air.

“Two days, madam,” replied Selina.

“Well, I’m glad to find you earning your bread *honestly*,” laying a peculiar stress on the word ‘*honestly*,’ “and not leading a life of idleness.”

Mrs. Jefferson approached, with a look of alarm, and the other ladies appeared to anticipate an explosion of some kind, for they glanced with undisguised curiosity from Mrs. Forsythe to Selina, whose simple, but tasteful toilette, and pretty face, had excited more envy than good will in their breasts. “And so you know Miss Stratford?” said Mrs. Jefferson.

“Yes, I *do* know her,” was the answer, accompanied by a shake of the head, full of import, and by a gravity of countenance that indicated the knowledge was not very favourable to the young lady.

“If I had the least notion that she had the honour of knowing you, my dear friend, I would instantly have applied to you for her character,” observed Mrs. Jefferson. “Pray, why did you not tell me that you were known to Mrs. Forsythe?” demanded she.

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“ I was not aware, madam, that Mrs. Forsythe was an acquaintance of yours,” replied Selina, with a calmness and dignity that ought to have vouched that she could have had no motive for concealment; “ and I was not privileged to refer to this lady for a recommendation.”

“ No, she was *not* privileged, Mrs. Jefferson. I permit no persons to use my name, unless I can vouch for every action of their lives; and of how few can one speak with certainty!” and Mrs. Forsythe turned up her eyes to the ceiling, with an appealing glance.

“ How very odd!” whispered Mrs. Willcocks to Mrs. Burford, who sat next her.

“ Yes, very, indeed!”

“ It’s quite like a scene in a play, isn’t it? when something is about to be discovered.”

“ I wonder if the governess will turn out to be a thief?”

“ I think it’s more likely that she is something even worse, for she has a very sly countenance, and looks very impudent.”

“ Yes, so she does. I noticed how bold she

looked when she answered Mrs. Jefferson; quite like a stage player: she drew herself up with a grand air."

"You may go and pour out the coffee and tea," said Mrs. Jefferson, with an angry air; and then, turning to her friend with beseeching countenance, she whispered, "I'm on thorns, yes, positively on thorns, my dear Mrs. Forsythe, to hear all you know of my governess. I'm sure there must be something wrong, very wrong. I read it in your countenance the moment you spoke to her. You have such an expressive countenance, my dear Mrs. Forsythe, that I can read it like a book."

"Why, the truth is, I can't say much in her favour; that's the fact. No, she would be very sorry to refer you to me for a character. But I'd rather say no more. Indeed I would."

"But would it be kind towards me, or towards dear Matty and Julia, who dote on you, my dearest friend, to leave me in ignorance on a point of such importance as the true character of their governess?"

"Use your eyes; observe her well, and there

will be no need of my saying anything about her. I'm by no means ill-natured, and have a dislike to mixing myself up with other people's business; besides, I should not like having an action brought against me for slander. Truth, you know, is now considered a libel; so people must be very cautious what they say."

The gentlemen now joined the ladies, their spirits very much elevated by the fiery wines they had been drinking, and their natural reserve much lessened. They approached the tea-table where Selina was presiding, and, staring at her with undissembled looks of admiration, formed a circle around it.

"Though I seldom drink tea," said Mr. Wilcocks, "I could not resist a cup if offered by such fair hands as this young lady's;" and he simpered and tried to look insinuating.

"The young lady need put no sugar in," observed Mr. Burford, "for her smile is enough to sweeten the tea;" and then he laughed loudly at his own wit.

"Come, come, what business have you old married men to be flocking around a young

lady?" asked a Mr. Blayton. "It's only bachelors like me that are privileged."

"Can I be of any use to you, Miss Stratford?" said Mr. Jefferson, forgetting, in the effect produced on him by the unusual quantity of wine he had drank, that his jealous wife's eyes were upon him.

"I vote for our all turning footmen to this beautiful young lady," said Mr. Wilcocks.

"Hi! hi! Oh, Matty, what fun," giggled Miss Julia.

Selina preserved her usual calmness and decorum of demeanour, but the admiration of the half-tipsy men grew so fervent as to render them unconscious that they were offending her.

"Dip your finger in my cup, Miss," said Mr. Burford, dropping on one knee, and holding up his cup; and his burlesque appearance in this position set all the others laughing, and produced shrieks of mirth from the Misses Jefferson.

"Good heavens! what an indecent scene," exclaimed Mrs. Burford. "Well, did you ever?"

“No, never!” replied Mrs. Wilcocks. “What a barefaced flirt she must be. Oh, the men, the men! when they proceed to such extremities in our presence, what would they not do if we were absent?”

“Ah! what indeed? It’s quite dreadful.”

“Really, I must put a stop to this shameful conduct,” said Mrs. Jefferson, who had been for some time watching with eyes flashing with jealousy, and cheeks crimson with rage, the open look of admiration with which her husband regarded Selina.

“Didn’t I tell you to use your eyes, my dear friend,” observed Mrs. Forsythe. “Need I enter into any particulars *now*? you must have seen enough to judge for yourself this evening. Don’t be agitated—Mr. Jefferson is, I must own, making a great fool of himself—so all the men are—but forewarned is forearmed, you know.”

Mr. Blayford, encouraged by the folly of his companions, dropped on his knees on one side of Selina, Mr. Burford still remaining in a similar posture at the other, and, seizing her hand, attempted to kiss it.

Selina rose from her chair, her cheeks covered with blushes, and, snatching her hand from his grasp, retreated to the other end of the chamber, where the ladies were seated, approached Mrs. Jefferson, and, while attempting to request her interference to check the rudeness of her male guests, burst into tears.

The suddenness with which she snatched her hand from the grasp of Mr. Burford, caused that gentleman to lose his equilibrium. He fell prostrate on his face, and his wig rolled off; an accident which greatly increased the hilarity of his companions, whose vociferous shouts of laughter rendered every attempt of the female part of the company to speak, inaudible. But no sooner had the men perceived that Selina was in tears, than, shocked at having pained her, they, one and all, followed her, entreating for pardon. But even this *amende honorable*, though really well-intentioned, partook, owing to their inebriety, of the ludicrous character of their exaggerated admiration.

“Pray forgive me, loveliest of your sex,” stuttered Mr. Blayford; “I would not offend such beauty for worlds.”

“Nor I,” “Nor I,” exclaimed Messrs. Wilcocks and Burford.

“No one could be such a brute as to intentionally hurt the feelings of Miss Stratford,” said Mr. Jefferson, looking all admiration and regret.

“Hold your tongue, Mr. Jefferson; hold your tongue, I insist. You don’t know what you are saying; but you will be sorry enough for this folly to-morrow,” said his wife, rage sparkling in her small grey eyes, and glowing in her cheeks.

“And you, Mr. Wilcocks, you may well be ashamed of yourself,” observed his better half, looking at him most angrily.

“But what have I done?” demanded the accused. “The only crime I plead guilty to is having, and I swear it was unintentional, distressed this young lady, from whose beautiful eyes I would not have drawn a tear for worlds.”

“I shall go mad! I shall go positively mad,” exclaimed his enraged wife.

“And I,” rejoined her husband, “am ready to go down on my knees, and ask the young lady’s pardon; though, hang me if I know for

what; but what matters it?—beauty in tears, no man with a heart can resist.”

“You are right, Wilcocks! Yes, by Jove, you are right,” said Mr. Burford. “We ought all to go down on our knees to propitiate such a lovely girl. Never have my eyes gazed on such charms.”

“Mr. Burford, Mr. Burford, hold your tongue; you are behaving most improperly, and know not what you say;” and here Mrs. Burford became so agitated that she burst into tears.

While this scene was occurring, Selina stood near Mrs. Jefferson, as if to seek protection from the intoxicated men, from whose approach she shrank with undisguised disgust and alarm. But she found not the protection she sought, for Mrs. Jefferson’s jealousy being excited by the glances of admiration which her husband continued to fix on Miss Stratford, became so angry, that, unable any longer to subdue her temper, she turned angrily to Selina, and ordered her to leave the room.

“Go quickly,” said the infuriated woman; “you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to make

such an exhibition in the presence of respectable married women, whose husbands you lay your artful snares to entice. Leave the room."

"Come, come," said Mr. Blayford, somewhat sobered by Mrs. Jefferson's anger and injustice, "this young lady must not suffer for our folly. She has been the innocent victim to our admiration—too freely manifested, I am willing to admit,—and for which we owe her our apologies; but no blame can possibly be attributed to her. Jefferson, set this matter right with Mrs. Jefferson. You know the fault was all on our side."

"I desire that Mr. Jefferson will not attempt to utter a single word in justification of conduct so shockingly improper," observed his wife, her face scarlet with anger; and, again pointing to the door, she motioned to Selina to withdraw.

Indignation had dried the tears on the cheek of the insulted girl, and, disdaining to attempt an exculpation, which she knew would not be received, she left the room with a calm dignity, which prejudiced, still more strongly, the female part of the company against her. The men, with

the exception of Mr. Blayford, looked stolid and crest-fallen. With returning ebriety came the terror of their wives, and the angry glances of these last were little calculated to reassure them. Mr. Blayford, happy in the independence and impunity afforded him by his "state of single blessedness," felt his courage increase in proportion to the diminution of it in his companions; and with an assurance very unsuited to conciliate the prejudices of the ladies, or to ameliorate the position of their victim, he coolly advanced towards them, and demanded why the folly of the men,—and folly he now was prepared to admit they had been guilty of,—should be visited on her who had most reason to complain of it?

"The less said on the subject the better," replied Mrs. Jefferson. "You are not married, Mr. Blayford, and therefore are not so much to blame, although you must allow me to say, that my presence, and that of these ladies, ought to have induced a greater circumspection on your part."

"Really, ma'am, the whole affair was, after

all, but a joke ; a bad one, it may be, but produced by the hilarity incident on a very agreeable dinner ; and I should be very sorry, and so I am sure would be my friends," (turning to the crest-fallen husbands present,) "if the charming young lady who has left the room was to suffer for our sins."

"I must be the best judge of what is due to myself and family, and beg that this painful subject may not be renewed," said Mrs. Jefferson, with an air of offended dignity.

"Yes, my dear Blayford, my wife is right, indeed she is always so : let the disagreeable subject end ;" and the cowardly Mr. Jefferson, dreading a curtain lecture, cast a most humble and deprecatory glance at his angry wife.

"I need not advise you to send your governess away as soon as possible," said Mrs. Forsythe. "After what you have seen you must be aware what a dangerous person she is to have in a house where there is a man who has such a taste for beauty as your husband. The best of men have their faults," and Mrs. Forsythe turned up her eyes and sighed. "Ah ! my dear friend,

you handsome women, when you are chosen by some enamoured man for your good looks, seldom reflect that when youth has passed, and diminished, if not destroyed, the charms that won them," and here the speaker looked at Mrs. Jefferson, "they will be apt to look elsewhere for beauty, and be the more attracted to it from the contrast afforded by the faded comeliness of their wives."

Every word of this spiteful speech took the effect intended on the jealous mind of Mrs. Jefferson, and her friend marked with satisfaction that it did so. Extremely plain in looks, Mrs. Forsythe had, during her youth, felt the disadvantage of ugliness, having never touched the heart of mortal, notwithstanding every effort, and the sacrifice of all maidenly reserve and modesty, to accomplish so desired an object. Hence her hatred to beauty became intense. To those in actual possession of it, she felt a positive enmity; and even those who could no longer boast of the attraction, she was disposed to punish for their former claims to the dangerous, but coveted gift. Mrs. Jefferson was one of the few

persons who still retained a recollection of the good looks she prided herself on some twenty years ago. So little trace of them remained, that, among recent acquaintances, her having once possessed them would be deemed a very debateable point ; and her hen-pecked spouse had so completely forgotten the fact, as sometimes, and particularly when looking at youth and beauty, to wonder why he had married the plain, faded woman who ruled his house and himself with so despotic a sway as to destroy the comfort of both. This oblivion of all her “endearing young charms” he, like many other prudent husbands, carefully confined to his own breast, well aware that aught which could ever be implied into a symptom of such ingratitude and want of memory, would but render his lot still more insupportable. Seldom did his wife’s dear friend, Mrs. Forsythe, visit them, without her punishing Mrs. Jefferson for the recollection of her former personal attractions and present groundless vanity ; and the graceless husband would have had a spiteful pleasure in the mortification of his better half, were it not that

the blows aimed at her rebounded to him. To wound Mrs. Jefferson, it was necessary that hints and inuendos should be given of the fickleness and ingratitude of men in general, but of husbands in particular—hints which never failed to awaken the jealousy of his wife, and to draw down on his head a series of curtain-lectures, enough to quell the courage of a stouter heart than his, followed by days of sullen silence, or outbursts of violent reproach, that rendered his home insupportable. But Mrs. Forsythe was rich—had, as she herself frequently reminded her friends, neither kith nor kin who could advance a claim to become her heir—and as she said, despised men too much ever to marry again; she should certainly bequeath her fortune to those who studied her wishes and comfort. This speech, often repeated, had secured the wily Mrs. Forsythe an established footing in the houses of four or five of her legacy-hunting acquaintances, each of whom considered her to be one of the most disagreeable women in the world, and avenged themselves for their assiduous court to her, by heaping all manner of abuse on

her when in the privacy of a conjugal *tête-à-tête*. The Jeffersons were the most persevering in their attentions. Many were the dinners given to conciliate this vulgar and gross-minded favourite of fortune, every dish, and every kind of wine, being selected with a direct reference to her peculiar taste, and a ready assent being always accorded to every assertion she was pleased to make. Nor did this woman “do her spiriting gently ;” *au contraire*, she exercised an unceasing tyranny over those who, from mercenary motives, submitted to her sway. They were compelled to adopt her opinions, friendships, and enmities ; to extend a constant hospitality, (which she never returned,) and carefully to repress every symptom of displeasure at the rude speeches and insulting hints she was in the constant habit of inflicting on them. Nor was she imposed on by their subservience and duplicity.

Perfectly aware of their real sentiments, and of the motive that actuated their hypocrisy, she despised them while availing herself of their hospitality, and often indulged a smile while meditating on the cruel disappointment she

meant to inflict on their selfish hopes and expectations.

“Leave my money to such folk,” would she say, “who hate, but fear me! No; not a shilling. They think they deceive me into a belief of their attachment: but it is *I* who deceive them. I live on the enemy, enjoy dainties at their expense, which I would grudge to buy; pass my time in amusements provided by their purses; keep up an emulation between them, as to who shall most toady and feast me; and if they outlive me, they shall find how well I understood, and duly appreciated, their interested attentions.”

Such was the woman on whom these parasites fawned and counted.

With a beating heart and blushing cheeks, Selina ascended to her wretched bed-room. That she should be insulted because the vulgar and inebriated guests of Mr. Jefferson had chosen to annoy her by their folly, struck her as something so very unreasonable, that she could in no way comprehend it, except by concluding (and the conclusion was not far from

the truth) that the female part of the company had also transgressed the bounds of temperance. What had she done? how drawn on herself the annoyance to which she had been subjected? were questions she in vain tried to solve. The hostility of the ladies, so openly revealed by their angry glances and avoidance of her on an occasion when womanly feeling ought to have moved them to sympathize with her alarm and distress, and to show their displeasure alone to the authors of it, was incomprehensible to her. Had Mrs. Forsythe instilled into their minds the prejudices which it was but too apparent from her manner she entertained towards the poor ward of her brother? was the next question that suggested itself to her bewildered mind.—Yes, it must be so; and yet what had she done to incur the hatred of this person?

While indulging in these reflections, Kitty made her appearance.

“I’m come, Miss, if you please,” said the girl, with a look of sympathy that did her honour, “to spare you from being affronted.

Missis has ordered that you should not be allowed to see the young ladies, and that I'm to undress and put them to bed. I didn't like to tell you this before them, for Miss Julia is so himperent, that she'd be sure to say something saucy to you, so I just ran up before 'em, having given them some bits of pastry and pudding in the dining-room, to keep them quiet while I ran up. Ah! Miss, I thought you'd not stay long here; you're too handsome and genteel. Missis can't abide any one that's pretty, that's the truth of it; and only I mind my P's and Q's so well," and here Kitty, the plain and homely maid of all work, assumed the air of a beauty, "I'd never be able to keep my place; not that it's much of a place, God knows! but still, missis is so spiteful, that if I went away before I could have a year's character, she might do me a mischief. She's as jealous as she can be of master: yes, Miss, indeed she is, for all you look so surprised; and if he only looks at me a bit,—and he has a great trick of staring people out of countenance,—she, instead of blaming him, as she

ought, blames the person he looks at. Thomas was quite vexed, Miss, when he seed them tipsy gentlemen kneeling down and wanting to kiss your hand, and falling about the floor. He saw well enough it wasn't your fault, but he knew missis would put it on your back. She's such a rum un! Why, would you believe it, Miss, she was going to turn me away without a character, because master happened one day to stare at me, though I never saw it, and she called me all manner of names; and the very week after, she abused me like a pickpocket, because I gave master a box in the ear for attempting to kiss me on the stairs, which she saw from over the banisters. But I told her, and him too, that if ever he tried to kiss me again, or so much as laid a finger on me, I'd leave the marks of my hand on his face; and so, ever since, he lets me alone."

Here the loquacious Kitty was interrupted by hearing the voices of the young ladies, who, having finished devouring the fragments of pastry she had given them, were ascending in search of her.

“Lock your door, Miss,” said the well-meaning girl; “and as Missis said before Thomas, that you should be turned away to-morrow morning, take my advice, and give warning first. If you write her a note, I’ll come back for it.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE proceeding counselled by Kitty offered some temptation to Selina. The greatest of all was, that it would save her from the rudeness and insult which she felt certain that Mrs. Jefferson would assail her with; and daunted by the dread of this, she was more than half disposed to write a note, stating her intention of giving up her situation, and depart without seeing that lady. But then came the thought, whether her taking this step might not be construed into a tacit admission of guilt of some kind, though what that guilt could be, she could not form even the most remote notion. No; she would calmly and steadily wait Mrs. Jefferson's pleasure, confront her with the dignity of conscious virtue and propriety, and if she could not convince that unreasonable woman of her innocence, at least prove to her that she did not shrink from an interview.

Selina pressed a sleepless couch that night; many and painful were the reflections that forced themselves on her mind. She was angry with herself that such persons as those who composed the circle in which she had met with insult and injustice that evening could have the power of wounding and humiliating her; but so it was; and she learned to know the bitter lesson, that the unprotected and dependant can be made to suffer by those whose approval could afford no satisfaction, because they are known to be incompetent to discover merit, or to appreciate it. At an early hour she was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Jefferson.

“She’s in a topping passion, Miss,” said Kitty, “and has scolded master all night. I heard her waking him several times, that she might have her scold out; but it wasn’t much use, for he was snoring again as loud as ever in two minutes.”

“I suppose I need not tell you why I have sent for you thus early, Miss Stratford,” said Mrs. Jefferson, when Selina entered the room. “You must have guessed that after the disgrace-

ful scene of last night, I could not permit you to remain a single day longer in my family."

"The scene to which you refer, Madam, though very painful, was not disgraceful to *me*," replied Selina with dignity. "I cannot be made answerable for the levity and folly of persons, for whose unaccountable conduct, the only excuse that can be urged, was their inebriety.—Your presence, Madam, ought to have secured me from being made the subject of their coarse pleasantries; but as it did not, I must confess that I anticipated sympathy and protection from you, instead of unmerited reproof and insult. I have consequently come to the determination of remaining no longer under a roof where I cannot count on the protection so needful to a person in my situation, and will, as you desire it, immediately leave your house."

"'Pon my word, you take the business very coolly," replied Mrs. Jefferson, her face becoming crimson with rage. "One would suppose you were a princess in disguise, a persecuted innocent, instead of a ——, but I will be cool—

yes, I won't demean myself by applying to you the terms you deserve."

"Madam, you must excuse my withdrawing, I cannot subject myself to further insult," and Selina walked towards the door.

"Yes, go, you shameful, forward, impudent ——" screamed rather than said, Mrs. Jefferson; but the terrified girl had retreated before that vulgar woman had finished the sentence, and breathless with agitation had reached her miserable chamber, of which she locked the door while she packed up her things, and put on her cloak and bonnet; dreading being pursued by the termagant Mrs. Jefferson. In a few minutes, Kitty, with stealthy steps, ascended the stairs, and whispering through the key-hole "it's I, Miss," was let in.

"I guessed how it would be, "Thomas and I have been listening at the door to all Missis said; she ought to be ashamed of herself, so she ought, to call any one such names. Thomas has run out to call a fly for you, Miss, and he and I will take down your box, and put it into it, though we should lose our places for it."

“Thank you, my good Kitty,” said Selina, putting her hand in her purse, and offering half-a-crown to the girl; but the gift was refused.

“No, Miss, not a penny will I take, nor Thomas neither. You don’t know how long you may be out of place,—I beg your pardon, Miss, out of a situation I meant to say,—and you have already been very gen’rous to us. May all good fortens attend you, Miss,” and Kitty wiped with the back of her hand a tear that was glistening in her eye.

This kindness from the simple, but good-hearted girl, touched Selina, and the spirit that resisted with dignity the insults of Mrs. Jefferson, gave way before the sympathy of her servant.

“I thank you, my good Kitty,” said she, and hurried from the room, eager to leave a house where she had suffered such humiliation. But her egress was not to be as silent, or as unnoticed as she had hoped. In the lobby, the two young ladies, her late pupils, were waiting to vent their malice on her.

“ Ah! who pulled off Mr. Burford’s wig?” demanded Matilda, “and who knocked the gentleman down?” asked Miss Julia. “What fun it was, wasn’t it Matty?”

“ Yes, famous fun, only mamma says it was so wrong, and that Miss Stratford is so naughty that we must not speak to her.”

“ I’m glad you’re going away, for you have done nothing but scold us ever since you came, you cross, ill-natured thing,” cried Miss Jefferson, as Selina hurried down stairs, where she found Thomas, who announced that the fly was at the door, and ran to assist Kitty in bringing down the trunk. Selina was soon seated in the carriage, and her traps, as Thomas called them, being placed in it, she directed the driver to Mrs. Vernon’s; but when the vehicle entered the next street, a small parcel was thrown into it, which, on examining, she found to be addressed to her. She opened it, and discovered a month’s salary, remitted by Mr. Jefferson, with a few civil lines of regret for the annoyance to which she had been subjected the previous night; and for the result which would, he added, he felt sure, be a great loss to his children. The tone of the

note was so reserved and respectful, that even the jealous wife of the writer might have perused it without finding aught to justify suspicion. The truth was, Mr. Jefferson was not the gallant, gay Lothario his *cara sposa* chose to imagine, and which her invidious friend Mrs. Forsythe, for the sake of vexing her, loved to encourage her to believe. Though he might, in a moment of *gaieté de cœur*, go so far as to risk a "chaste salute" to a maid servant, more in the spirit of fun, than with any more culpable intention, he had perception enough to discover, even at the first interview, that the new governess was not a person to permit the slightest approach to familiarity. Selina would have infinitely preferred not receiving any remuneration from the Jefferson family, but she determined to show the note and its enclosure to Mrs. Vernon, and to be guided by her counsel in the affair.

Her reception was as kind as her warmest anticipations could picture. "I am so rejoiced to see you, dear Miss Stratford," said her excellent friend. I guessed it would be impossible for you to remain long in such a family as the

one you entered, and the experience you have now had, must prevent your again accepting any situation which does not hold forth a prospect of comfort. How glad my husband will be to find you here! He has blamed me, and himself too, for not having prevented your going to Mrs. Jefferson's. It was only yesterday that a friend of his told him that he was commissioned to look out for a governess for a very respectable family, in which the teacher would be treated with every kindness. We thought of you directly, and regretted the more your having engaged with that disagreeable person."

Greatly pleased was the worthy Mr. Vernon, when he found Selina at his house. But when the cause was revealed, and the insults she had received were made known, his indignation was so great, that he was more than half disposed to have a lawyer's letter sent to Mrs. Forsythe, threatening her with an action for defamation, being, as he declared his belief to be, the only means of putting a stop to her malice.

"Pray do not take any such step, I trust I may never again come in contact with her,"

replied Selina, "and I shrink from the publicity, such a measure as the one you propose might entail, with indescribable terror."

After a few days passed tranquilly with her kind friends, Selina reminded them of the inquiry for a governess made to Mr. Vernon, and repeated to her by his excellent wife.

"I wish you had not named it, my dear," said the husband. "Miss Stratford has need of quiet and the society of friends, after the annoyance to which she has been exposed, and gladly would I urge her to remain with us, at least for some time."

Mrs. Vernon pressed the invitation given by her husband to their guest, with all the warmth and affection that prompted it; but Selina persevered in her desire to seek a situation, and they at length yielded to her wishes. The following day Mr. Vernon wrote to his friend, and in a week after, the arrangement was finally made, and Selina went to the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Buxton were rich, but narrow-minded persons. Having from comparative poverty, unexpectedly inherited the fortune of

a relation who never gave any intimation of recollecting their existence, until he was near resigning his own, when he bequeathed them his wealth, they found themselves suddenly elevated to a position, to fill which with decent dignity they were not quite prepared. There was nothing they so ardently desired as to conduct themselves, and their newly formed establishment, with a propriety that might conceal how totally unaccustomed they were to the comforts and luxuries they now possessed. The dread of exposing their ignorance to their neighbours, and even to their servants, greatly impaired the sense of enjoyment, which “the goods the gods provided,” conferred on them. They were in a state of perpetual constraint before the guests they invited to partake their hospitality, and the domestics who waited at the well covered board. The handsome and well furnished mansion, so unexpectedly come into their possession, they looked on as nothing short of a palace, and so splendid did its appointments appear in their eyes, that they wondered that their visitors were not more impressed by its grandeur, and that their

servants seemed in no way surprised by it. Their predecessor, *parvenu*, although he was, had mixed in good society, and had got accustomed to all the external trappings that wealth can furnish. He had kept a French cook, an *artiste* of considerable merit, whose *entrées* and *entremets* had found such favour in the neighbourhood, as to win a popularity for his master that might not otherwise have been conceded him. A *maître d'hôtel*, groom of the chambers, under butler, and two tall footmen, had formed the male portion of the establishment of the late owner of Heathfield Park; and when Mr. Buxton succeeded to its possession, he and his wife, after serious consideration and mature deliberation, came to the conclusion, that as the servants they found in the house must know the ways of it much better than any new ones could be expected to do, or, in truth, than they the owners did, it would be well to engage their continuance in the establishment.

This note of preparation sounded well in the neighbourhood. It was clear, so argued the occupants of the castles, abbeys, and parks that

dotted the vicinity, that the *parvenu* come amongst them was determined to keep up the style of living of his deceased relation, and as hospitality, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, it was agreed that the Buxtons should be well received. The servants were the first to discover the total ignorance of refined life and its usages, in their new employers. The *maître d'hôtel* perceived at a glance, that they were awe-struck by the splendour of their new possessions, and his respect for them was by no means increased by this discovery. The *chef de cuisine*, when he presented his *menu*, saw that they could not even read it, and was compelled to explain; in very unintelligible broken English, the signification of the various items entered on it; the confusion and dismay pictured on their countenances, as he endeavoured to describe the component parts of the different dishes, was evident. The under butler and footman glanced at each other in horror, when they found that their master and mistress did not know how to name any of the *plats* offered to them, and saw them use a knife and fork to serve dishes

invariably dissected with a spoon. Conscious that the inquisitorial eyes of their menials were fixed on them, and fearful that their inexperience in French cookery, and the elegant “appliances to boot” of a fashionably served table would be exposed, they sat at the head and foot of the well covered board in a state of discomfort not to be described. The sounds of their own voices, as they reverberated in the marble-lined and lofty *salle à manger*, rendered them nervous; and yet they felt that to disguise their ignorance and constraint, they must assume an appearance of courage and ease, which they were far from possessing. The repast was any thing but an agreeable one to them. Unused to French *plats*, even this novelty failed to gratify their unsophisticated palates; and they would have infinitely preferred a slice of roast beef and vegetables, or some such plain and simple fare, to the elaborate *entrées* set before them, the merits of which they were not prepared to appreciate. It is a fact known to many, that savages when they first hear fine music experience no pleasure

from the dulcet sounds, preferring their own discordant ones, to which long habit has inured them. So it is with homely palates; that food to which they have been accustomed, they find preferable to the most exquisite viands previously untasted. Glad were this pair, when the dessert placed on the table, and the servants withdrawn, they found themselves released from the intolerable constraint under which they had been suffering.

Mrs. Buxton drew a deep inspiration, and looking up at the richly decorated ceiling, exclaimed—"Well, my dear Mr. B., how glad I am it is over. I wonder shall I ever get used to it. But is it not a miserable thing to be in one's own house, and not to be able to feel that all the fine things about one, really do belong to us?"

"Never mind, my dear. It *does* seem strange just at first; but I dare say we shall get perfectly used to it in time. One does to everything, I have remarked; and a day will come when we shall think no more of this grand house, than if we had been living in it all our

lives. You see the servants don't seem to think anything of it."

"Yes, my dear Mr. B., I noticed that, and, only I was shy, I would have told some of them to be more careful of this beautiful Turkey carpet, which I saw them let drops of water fall on, from that huge silver thing, that looks like a fountain, near the sideboard."

"I feel quite uncomfortable at having eaten so many different kickshaws. Well, they may say what they will, but give me a joint of well boiled, or roasted meat, in preference to all the French stews and ragouts in the world, which clog, without satisfying the stomach."

"Just what I think, too, my dear Mr. B. I couldn't help remarking all the time these powdered fellows were staring us in the face, watching every morsel we put into our mouths, and, as I really fancied two or three times, laughing at us, how much more comfortable we used to be at dinner at Dairy Cottage, in our snug little parlour, with tidy little Nancy to wait on us, and our one good dish of meat with vegetables, and our glass of mild ale, than

in this vast room, with its cold shining walls, its painted ceiling, and gilt cornices, the blaze of light over the table, and the load of plate on it."

"I confess, my dear Sarah, that the same thought occurred to me. It's a pity the old gentleman never thought of telling us that we were to be his heirs, never asked us to come here and see him for a bit, so that we could have been prepared for all this grandeur, and need not be shy before these powdered jackanapes. But it's no use thinking of that now; we ought to be thankful that, if he forgot us for so many years, he remembered us at last, and try to enjoy the good things he has left us."

"Very true, my dear Mr. B.,—very true. You always say the right thing, and in the right place. I've been thinking that if we got a governess, we could learn many things from her, which would be much less disagreeable than learning from servants, or having them staring at our ignorance of many things, which it's no fault of ours that we don't know, seeing that we never saw them before."

“But our children are so young, Sarah. They won’t be fit for a governess for two or three years to come.”

“Granted; but if we now engage one, *we* may profit by it, and, by an intimate association with a well-educated lady-like woman, become more fit for the station we are now to fill. We can always say we wished to have a first-rate governess for our daughters, even to begin with, instead of the nursery ones, half nurse-maid and half teacher, which some persons employ.”

“It’s a very good notion, Sarah; and I will ask two or three of my friends to look out for such a person.”

Such was the family into which Selina was about to enter, and the engagement being concluded, a request was made that she should lose as little time as possible in proceeding to Heathfield Park.

CHAPTER IX.

THE kindness of Miss Stratford's reception at Heathfield Park, made her feel at home there before she had been an hour beneath its roof. Mrs. Buxton, a good-looking, over-dressed, kind-mannered little woman, was seated in a library of large dimensions, and classical decoration, when Miss Stratford was announced. She stood up, advanced to meet her with extended hands, which cordially clasped those of Selina, welcomed her with unaffected pleasure, and, before the servant could place a chair for her, drew one herself close to that to which she had risen from, and even pushed a *tabouret* in front of it, for her feet. The servant stared at his mistress's unceremonious proceedings; and Selina, though grateful, experienced some surprise at such unprecedented condescension.

“You must have some luncheon, indeed you must,” said the mistress of the mansion, on hospitable thoughts intent.

This proposition being declined,

“O! I see you are afraid of giving trouble,” resumed Mrs. Buxton; “but pray don’t, for we have so many servants—indeed, so many more than we can find work for—that you need not mind employing them. We dine late, too; and, to tell you the truth, our dinners are so Frenchified, that I am afraid you won’t like ’em. Well, then, a sandwich; or at least, a bit of cake and a glass of wine?”

No excuse would be taken, and a bit of cake and a little wine and water were at length accepted.

“I am so glad you are come, and so pleased that you are not old or plain,” continued Mrs. Buxton, looking with undissembled complacency at Selina. “I do so like handsome people.”

Selina blushed at the implied compliment.

“My children are very young, Miss Stratford: too young to be yet able to derive all the benefit I trust they may hereafter receive from

your instructions; but, in the mean while, you will begin with them, for I'm sure," and the speaker sighed deeply, "it is never too soon to commence giving them good manners and habits."

Mr. Buxton soon after entered, and gave a kind reception to the governess; and there was something so peculiarly good-natured in the unceremonious cordiality of this unsophisticated couple, that, although conscious of their want of refinement and high breeding, Selina thought that the absence of both was fully compensated for by it. The children, too, were pretty, rosy-checked, sweet-tempered little girls, who ran with outstretched arms to embrace their mamma, the moment she entered the nursery to present them to Selina. A tall, fat, stern-looking woman, who enacted the *rôle* of upper nurse, arose with an ill grace to receive Mrs. Buxton, and called out—"Miss Buxton, Miss Mary, you must not run wild in that manner. It's very rude. Walk up slowly to your mamma, drop her a nice curtsy, and behave like young ladies."

But little was the caution or reproof heeded. The little girls rushed to their doting mother's embrace, clung to her, and almost smothered her with kisses.

"Miss Buxton, Miss Mary ! you must not behave so vulgarly," said the stern woman, advancing to remove them from Mrs. Buxton.

"No, Mrs. Price, pray let them kiss me as much as they like," said the kind mother, her eyes beaming with tenderness, as they glanced from her first-born to little dimpled Mary.

"Well, Ma'am, *I* must not be blamed if they are as wild as colts," observed Mrs. Price, her colour, always a high one, becoming nearly crimson. "I assure you, Ma'am, at her grace's the Duchess of Sheerness's, I was never interfered with in the nursery ; and her grace would no more have permitted the ladies Adelaide, Victoria, or Albertine to rush up and embrace *her*, as Miss Buxton and Miss Mary have just done you, than she would have allowed the Duke's great dog Hector to jump on her, and lick her grace's face."

Poor Mrs. Buxton looked so guilty and em-

barrassed, that Selina no longer wondered that the termagant Mrs. Price had taken advantage of her gentleness and good nature, to dictate to her mistress instead of receiving her instructions.

“Perhaps,” said the fond mother, with a beseeching look, “the Duchess of Sheerness was not so partial to children as I am?”

“Oh! her grace had just the *proper* affection for them, Ma’am. Her grace used to say to me—‘Now mind, my good Price,’ (her grace loved to call me her ‘good Price,’) ‘don’t let them be boisterous or rude. Never let them run, I can’t bear to see young ladies run. Make them always hold up their heads, walk slowly, and turn out their toes; and whenever I stoop to kiss their foreheads, don’t let them attempt to put their arms around my neck, to derange my *collerette* and hair.’ And, indeed, before I was with them three months, they’d have no more dreamt of rushing up to their mamma, and deranging her dress, than of pulling *me* about; but, I must say, her grace, who was a great lady in every respect—the daughter of a duke,

the sister of a duke, and the wife of a duke — knew perfectly how young ladies should be brought up.”

Selina wondered at the forbearance of Mrs. Buxton, and took a strong dislike to the woman who could thus abuse it. The children evinced a similar feeling towards Mrs. Price, added to a dread, which, when not in the presence of their mother, kept them in a state of constraint, little calculated to add to their health or comfort.

“This young lady,” said Mrs. Buxton to her little girls, “is so good as to promise me to teach you many things, if you will be good and obedient.”

Mrs. Price looked daggers at Selina, and was still more incensed, when the docile little girls, won by her mild countenance, (an attraction of which children are peculiarly sensitive,) walked over to her, held up their rosy mouths to be kissed, the elder promising to be very good, and the younger lisping “very dood,” after her.

“Look, Ma’am, how your beautiful lace *collerette* is torn,” said Mrs. Price; “what a pity.

But, I really believe, you never come into the nursery without having your dresses injured."

"Oh, the *collerette* can be very easily repaired," observed Mrs. Buxton.

"I'm very sorry to have torn your pretty collar," said the elder of the children, "but I was so glad to see you, dear, darling mamma, that I forgot all about the lace."

"And me too, mamma," lisped little Mary.

"I wish you would come into the nursery without any fine lace or thin dresses, dear mamma," said the elder girl; "so that we might kiss and hug you as much as we like, without being in fear of spoiling your pretty things."

"If you would learn to behave like young ladies, there need be no occasion for your mamma to leave off her fine lace or nice dresses," observed Mrs. Price, spitefully.

"You must not expect too much of them, Mrs. Price. I like my darlings to be fond of me, and to show it too; and I would prefer having all the lace I possess torn, than miss their kisses."

“Her Grace the Duchess of Sheerness was of a very different way of thinking. ‘My good Price,’ would her Grace say to me, ‘do prevent the children from being troublesome; I can’t bear being pulled about;’ and I am sure if the ladies Adelaide, Victoria, or Albertine, had torn one of her Grace’s *collerettes*, they would not have been admitted to her Grace’s presence for weeks; ay, or for even months after.”

“Come, Miss Stratford,” said Mrs. Buxton, “let me show you your room. We shan’t have much time to spare for dressing for dinner, and we are to have some company to-day.”

Again the children were fondly folded to the breast of their mother; not, however, without many cautions from Mrs. Price to take care and not injure the lace *collerettes*; and as the mistress of the mansion and Selina walked along the corridor, they could hear the harsh voice of Mrs. Price repeating her accustomed praises of her Grace the Duchess of Sheerness, who she invariably held up as the model for mothers, but of whom she impressed the minds

of her hearers with so very unfavourable an opinion, that they concluded that great lady to be destitute of all maternal tenderness. Mrs. Buxton and Selina did not, however, hear the concluding part of Mrs. Price's harangue, nor did she mean them so to do. It was directed to Betsey, the nurserymaid, and stated that, after all, comparisons are odious, for *some* people never could be like *other* people, and it was useless to expect it. Indeed, how could they, seeing that some folk were the daughters, sisters, and wives of dukes, and such like, and had queens, yes, *real* queens, to be godmothers, and a prince to be godfather to their children, while other folk had not even so much as a baronet (pronounced *barrowknight*) for a father, brother, or husband, and not even a lady of title, or a lord, to be godmothers or godfathers.

Mrs. Price, like the other pampered servants in Mr. Buxton's establishment, had quickly discovered that their master and mistress were not what they called "*real* quality." Hence they entertained for them a sentiment of contempt, which the good treatment and liberal wages

they received could not vanquish. The high-sounding titles of some of the aristocracy whom they had formerly served, gave them, as they fancied, a superiority over the servants of private individuals, however affluent these last might be; and the good nature of their present employers won no forbearance, for their ignorance of the uses of the luxuries that surrounded them, from these vulgar mercenaries.

When they had entered the establishment of the predecessor of Mr. Buxton, custom had rendered that gentleman used to the elegancies and luxuries which his wealth commanded, and his ostentation, no less than his epicurean taste, desired. Hence, although his servants had heard that he had *not* sprung from an ancient line, and that his demeanour, countenance, and manners, might have vouched the fact, the self-confidence, and assumed importance of the purse-proud *parvenu*, imposed a restraint, if not an awe, on his household, which those who composed it were far from feeling towards his successors.

Gratified as Selina was by the kindness of

Mrs. Buxton, and captivated by a simplicity and gentleness of manner, which, if always pleasing even in the poor, becomes doubly attractive in the rich ; and above all, in those with whom one is placed in a subordinate relation ; she could, nevertheless, have desired, for her good sense suggested its propriety, that that lady would assume a more dignified position towards herself, as well as towards her domestics. The chamber into which her kind hostess led her, possessed not only every comfort, but was redolent of every elegance, of life. It communicated with a saloon well stored with books, which Mrs. Buxton informed her were appropriated solely to her use ; and a “neat-handed-Phyllis,” who stood blushing and curtsying in the bed-room, was presented as the hand-maiden who was henceforth to receive orders solely from Miss Stratford. “And now, my dear young lady, I must leave you to dress for dinner. We are to have all the grandees in our neighbourhood, many of whom I have seen only once, and others whom I have never seen. It quite flutters me having to do the honours :

to strangers; and I am as yet so little at home in my own house, that many, if not all, my guests, know it and its ways better than I do. It's a great comfort, however, having you to keep me in countenance, for you are so kind and gentle, that I feel as if I knew you many years."

Selina, pitying her evident inexperience, was strongly tempted to propose remaining in her own room, in preference to joining the grandees, as Mrs. Buxton styled the expected visitants. Might *they* not deem *her* presence amongst them an intrusion, and resent it on their hostess? Were Mrs. Buxton a lady of high rank or established position in society, the case would be different. Such a personage might be privileged to introduce a governess into society, however elevated, beneath her own roof; but being only tolerated herself for her fortune, and with comparative strangers, Selina felt a strong reluctance that her kind hostess should, through inexperience and ignorance of the world, commit a solecism on its usages that might entail disagreeable consequences on her. Urged by this

feeling, yet unwilling to express her sentiments before the servant, she followed Mrs. Buxton into the corridor, and ventured to suggest that, in families in general, governesses did not dine at table when company were present.

“And why not?” asked Mrs. Buxton, with a look of utter surprise. “Surely,” continued she, “the education which a young lady must have received to fit her for being governess ought to entitle her to a place in any society. I have always had faith in the old saying, ‘manners makes the man;’ it also makes the lady; and I only wish,” and here the speaker sighed, “that all those whose fortunes place them in grand company were as well educated and well mannered as you are, my dear Miss Stratford. So let me hear no more objections to your taking your place at our table;” and off tripped the good-natured little woman, with a fine glow on her pretty face, which added greatly to its beauty, well satisfied with herself for having so far conquered her natural timidity and awe of the grandees, as to have carried her point of Selina’s dining with them, what-

ever *they* might choose to think of the measure.

When, in an hour after, Selina entered the library, attired in a style of simple elegance that might have defied the criticism of the most fastidious, her appearance was so satisfactory, and her manner so easy and unembarrassed, yet so correct, that Mrs. Buxton felt proud of such an inmate, and experienced new confidence for the ordeal of her first company dinner, hitherto so dreaded.

“Yes,” thought that kind-hearted but rustic woman, “I am now sure of one pleasant countenance at my own table; *she* will give me courage to meet the cold looks, or scrutinizing glances, of the fine ladies and gentlemen, who, knowing that I am not used to fine things or fine folks, will be on the alert to observe proofs, and I dare say I shall be sure to furnish but too many, of my ignorance.”

Mr. Buxton was no less pleased than his wife at the air and manner of Miss Stratford; he again welcomed her to Heathfield Park with a friendship and cordiality, the demonstrations

of which might have shocked the refined guests, whose arrival he was every moment expecting, had they been present; but luckily they had not yet made their appearance. Mrs. Buxton every two or three minutes cast an anxious look at the splendid Parisian *pendule* on the mantel-shelf.

“It’s just half-past seven o’clock,” said she; “and that was the time mentioned on the cards of invitation.”

“Lords and ladies are not so punctual as other people, my dear,” observed her husband; “and the more’s the pity; for what’s the use of keeping a fine French cook, if all his pains are to be lost by the dinner being kept waiting until it is completely spoilt.”

“Very true, my dear,—very true; but look, see, it is now ten minutes after the appointed time, and no one come. How can you account for it, my dear?”

“As I account for most things with which *grandees* have anything to do. They were probably careless about going to dress in time—forgot to order their carriages at the proper

hour—in short, my dear, thought us of so little importance, that, whether they kept us waiting a half-hour or more, was not of the least importance, as the great honour they confer on us, by coming, would atone for all delay.”

“Then perhaps they mayn’t come at all,” said Mrs. Buxton, looking agitated.

“No, you needn’t be afraid of that, Mrs. B.; they’ll come, sure enough, though probably not until the dinner is totally spoilt; and then they’ll go away, declaring that we have the worst cook, and give the worst dinners, of any one in the county.”

“Hush! was not that the sound of carriage-wheels?” exclaimed Mrs. Buxton.

“No; it is only the wind, which is getting up,” replied her husband.

Another anxious glance at the *pendule* showed Mrs. Buxton that a quarter of an hour had now elapsed since the half-hour after seven had struck.

“I declare I feel quite nervous, my dear,” observed Mrs. Buxton. “Should they not come, what will the whole county say? nay, what will the servants say?”

“Don’t trouble yourself about any such nonsense, my dear Sarah; they’ll come, be assured; and pray follow my advice, and never mind what the servants say.”

But, though the host offered this advice with an assumed *sang-froid*, it was clear, from his flurried countenance, that he was by no means satisfied at the non-arrival of his expected guests.

“Hark! surely I hear the sound of carriage-wheels! Yes, this time my ears have *not* deceived me;” and, as the sounds approached nearer, Mrs. Buxton arose from her chair, looked in the mirror over the chimney-piece, arranged the flowers of her cap and her splendid pearl necklace, and made a movement towards the bell, with the evident intention of ringing it.

“Stop, my dear Mrs. B.; what are you going to do?”

“To ring the bell, to desire the footman who answers it, to tell the porter to be ready with the hall door open.”

“No, my dear, it must not be done; the porter knows his duty, and would very ill receive

any instructions on the subject; besides, to open the door a second before the carriage stops at it, would be to prove to these fine grandees that they were anxiously expected. So mind, my dear, that you do not betray any thing like this."

Before the first carriage had been emptied of its occupants, a second, and a third rolled up, the sounds of each, as it followed rapidly upon the other, producing a visible perturbation in Mrs. Buxton, evinced by flushing of the face, and a nervous inquietude that denoted her consciousness of having a painful ordeal to pass, and her fear of not getting through it with credit. Again she arose from her seat, and advanced a few paces towards the door.

"Pray sit down, my dear Sarah, and do not rise from your chair until your lady guests draw near you."

The obedient wife did as she was told, and the groom of the chambers having thrown open the door of the library, announced, "Lord and Lady Forestville." Mr. and Mrs. Buxton advanced to meet them, the latter's curtesy being

a little too low, as she welcomed the lady, while her husband's bow lacked the ease, mingled with a certain air of homage, with which a well-bred man of the world receives persons of distinction who enter his house for the first time.

“Won't your ladyship be pleased to be seated,” said Mrs. Buxton. “Pray take this chair, for it is aired,” offering the one she had just risen from.

A slight movement of the muscles around the very thin lips of Lady Forestville, might have indicated, to a quick observer, that this solecism in high breeding, on the part of our hostess, had not passed unnoticed, and declining the one offered to her, she seated herself in another chair. Ere this was well accomplished, the door was again thrown open, and Lord and Lady Renfrewshire, and the Ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray were announced. Mrs. Buxton, her face now the colour of a damask rose, left her chair, and again the too respectful lowness of her curtsy struck the new comers. When Lady Renfrewshire introduced her two tall and stately daughters, remarkable for a profusion of red hair, which fell in long ringlets over their

shoulders and busts, their slight curtseys, and careless salutes, formed a striking contrast to the profound respect which marked the manner of their timid hostess.

“Sir Frederick and Lady Emily Marchmount,” said the groom of the chambers, and again the ceremonial of reception was gone through.

“General, Mrs. and Miss Grimthorpe” were next announced, followed by Mr. Morton Cavendish, and then the usual signal was given by the master of the house to have dinner served.

“I was very sorry that you were not able to come to us,” said Lady Renfrewshire, “when Mr. Buxton did us the honour of dining at Murray Castle.”

“Your ladyship is very kind, but since my arrival here I have not been quite well,” replied Mrs. Buxton, the truth of which assertion her varying colour, agitated manner, and tremulous voice bore evidence to.

“I too was much disappointed at not seeing you at Forestville Abbey,” observed the noble mistress of that ancient seat.

“Indeed, my lady, I was truly sorry not to be able to go to your ladyship; but my health did not permit it.”

“I must also express my regret at being as unfortunate as the rest of my fair neighbours, in not seeing you,” said Lady Emily Marchmount.”

“And I, too, must add my regret,” observed Mrs. Grimthorpe.

Again the nervous hostess repeated her sense of the kindness of each of her guests, and nearly in the same words to all, with so frequent a repetition of the phrase ladyships, as to draw a smile from the party. And now the guests, who were all well acquainted, too well, indeed, to be agreeable company to each other, began to chat together, the weather, as is usual in English society, forming the first topic, and that was followed by local news. The gentlemen, with grave looks, and sundry shakings of the head, reverting to the destruction of game by the poachers, against whom active and severe measures must be put into effect for denouncing the evil spirit abroad among the lower classes,

against which some means must be devised, to check the growing tendency to insubordination, against their lords and masters. The ladies lamented the dulness of the country; the *ennui* of being compelled to attend a county ball, to take place the ensuing week; canvassed the health, doings, and whereabouts of their absent acquaintance; never taking into consideration that their hostess was a stranger to, and knew nothing of the persons, or the subjects, of which they spoke. Mrs. Buxton sat as formally, upright in her chair, as a boarding school Miss in the olden time, when iron collars and monitors kept the head up and the shoulders down, *malgré* their owners. She tried to look interested in the topics canvassed by those around her, but had not courage to lift her voice to join in the conversation. Nor was it expected that she should. Her presence in her own house was as totally overlooked, as if there were no such person; the fine ladies, her visitors, seeming to forget that they were not the guests of the rich old *parvenu*, her predecessor in that mansion, where, there being no lady to *gêner* them by doing the

honours, they used to enjoy themselves more than in any other house in their neighbourhood. Not even the semblance of an apology, for the lateness of their arrival, was made by any of the company, except General and Mrs. Grimthorpe, who explained the cause of their delay, by stating the fact, that when half way, one of the carriage horses had lost a shoe.

“An old soldier, Mr. Buxton knows that he must give an example of punctuality,” said the General, while Mrs. Grimthorpe repeated for the third time, her regret at being so late. Many were the glances cast at Selina by the strangers around her. The women eyeing her with a cold stare of impertinence, and the men with a curiosity scarcely less disagreeable to her feelings.

“Devilish pretty girl that,” whispered Lord Forestville to Mr. Morton Cavendish, directing his attention to her.

“Do you think so?” drawled out that person in reply, after having examined Selina through his glass for a few minutes.

“By Jove, you must indeed be fastidious if

you don't agree with me in opinion," observed the peer, "for I know not when I have seen so pretty a creature."

"I *am* fastidious, I admit; and to confess the truth, can seldom discover beauty in *parvenues*."

"Well, I rejoice that I can see it wherever it exists; and that even, in a pretty milk maid as well as a duchess, I have a pleasure in beholding it."

"*Chacun a son goût*," replied Mr. Morton Cavendish, elevating his eyebrows, and glancing superciliously around the room.

CHAPTER X.

“*Le dîner est servi,*” said the *maître d’hôtel*, opening the folding doors. It had been the habit of this important personage, important at least in his own eyes, to make this daily announcement in his own language. Indeed, he spoke English so ill, that he would have considered his dignity compromised had he uttered it in what he, in the steward’s room, called “*cette langue barbare.*” A certain savoury odour, the sounds of moving feet at seven o’clock, and perhaps, also, certain feelings in the stomach peculiar to that region at the ordinary dinner hour, had taught Mr. and Mrs. Buxton to comprehend the pom-

pous Frenchman's sonorous phrase, without knowing a word of French. The host looking a little embarrassed, walked up and offered his arm to Lady Forestville.

"Pardon me," said that Lady, *sotto voce*, "but the Scotch blood of Lady Renfrewshire would never forgive me if I presumed to take precedence of her. You must, therefore, lead her out to dinner, for she is the oldest countess."

"That's just the reason I didn't want to have her next me," whispered Mr. Buxton, smiling as he made the confession, "for I don't admire old ladies, even though they may be countesses," and he continued to grasp the fair little hand he had seized, impelling, with a gentle violence, its owner to accompany him. Lord Forestville approached to give his arm to Lady Renfrewshire, whose heightened colour announced that she was not disposed to overlook the slight offered to her by her host, and Lord Renfrewshire, with a ponderous gravity, offered his to Mrs. Buxton.

"O, my Lord, pray excuse me," said the

timid woman, "I can't think of accepting your arm, until the other ladies have got gentlemen to hand them out." His stolid Lordship stared at her in utter astonishment, and then inquired whether she preferred being escorted by some more fortunate man. Sir Frederick Marchmont, something loath, offered to lead out the Lady Rosina Murray, and General Grimthorpe gave his arm to her sister, the Lady Alicia, while Mr. Morton Cavendish gave his arm to Lady Emily Marchmont.

"Well, I declare," said Mrs. Grimthorpe, "as there is no gentleman to hand me out, I'll take the arm of my daughter."

"Pray, my Lord, don't mind me,"—be so kind as to take care of Mrs. Grimthorpe," exclaimed the nervous and flurried hostess.

"Not for the world, Ma'am, not on any account could I suffer such a thing," replied Mrs. Grimthorpe, walking on with her daughter.

"Dear me, there is no one to take out Miss Stratford," said the agitated Mrs. Buxton, "what is to be done?"

“If the young lady will accept my other arm, Madam, it is very much at her service,” replied his stately lordship, which Selina having done, they proceeded to the *salle à manger*, around the table of which they found all the guests who had preceded them, standing, waiting for the presence of the hostess before they could take their seats, and evidently not a little surprised and disconcerted at the unusual length of time she had taken to come. Mrs. Buxton was led to her chair at the top of the table, by Lord Renfrewshire, and Lord Forestville took his place at her other side.

“What am I to do with this young lady?” demanded Lord Renfrewshire, a question that drew on the abashed Selina the eyes of all present.

“Let the young lady come down near me,” said Mrs. Grimthorpe, “and I will take care of her,” on which the solemn earl walked with Selina to the place designed, and having seen her seated, returned to his chair, next the hostess.

“*Soupe à la Reine*, Madam, or *Printanière*,” said a servant, offering a plate to Mrs. Buxton.

“Offer it to his lordship first,” replied she. The servant looked surprised, but did as he was told.

“Not on any account before you, Madam,” said the peer.

“I must entreat your lordship to take it, but perhaps your lordship does not like rain soup?”

Lord Renfrewshire stared at the speaker with undissembled astonishment, while the guests who were near enough to hear her voice, found it difficult to control their risibility.

The pertinacity with which Mrs. Buxton insisted on Lord Renfrewshire being helped to soup before herself, had occasioned a delay of a couple of minutes, during which the service of the table, in general so well conducted in that house, was interrupted. His lordship waved back the offered plate with his right hand, and Mrs. Buxton performed the same ceremony with her left, during which time, one of the servants passing behind their chairs

unfortunately touched the elbow of him who was offering the plate of soup from the lady to the lord, and *vice versá*, as he was ordered, and sent its contents over the person of the proud earl, whose countenance became most ludicrous under the infliction. His eyebrows were elevated an inch at least beyond their usual position, his face was crimson, and the few white hairs which graced his head, seemed to stand erect.

“Oh, my lord, I am so shocked that your lordship should suffer so much from your politeness!” exclaimed Mrs. Buxton, in a contrite tone.

“Or from your ignorance,” the angry peer was longing to say. He stood up, bowed stiffly to his hostess, and said he must withdraw to take off his coat.

“My ribbon too, is desecrated,” added he, with an air of solemnity. “How dreadful!” and he looked at the badge of *his order*, over which the white soup was streaming, with perfect horror depicted in his countenance.

“Oh, my lord, if its only the ribbon that is

injured," cried the good-natured but obtuse hostess, "I can supply its place, for I have several pieces of broad ribbon of various colours by me, for sashes for my little girls."

"Good heavens, Madam!" replied the peer, "talk of substituting the sash of a child for the ribbon of the order of the Bath, bestowed on me by the sacred hand of Majesty itself!" and the offended peer stalked with a lofty air out of the room, followed by Mr. Buxton, who insisted on his donning for the nonce, one of his coats, forgetful in his desire to be polite to the earl, that he was guilty of *impolitesse* to the noble ladies occupying the chairs next to him, in quitting them so unceremoniously.

"Excuse me, Sir," replied Lord Renfrewshire, "I would not on any account wear any coat but my own," and he looked as important as if he had uttered a sentence worthy of being handed down to posterity.

"Then let me have your coat wiped and dried, my lord. One of the footmen will place it before the fire, and it will be dried in a jiffey."

“Pardon me, Sir,” said the peer, no one but my *valet de chambre* ever presumes to touch my coat.”

“But as he is not here,” observed the host, “what is to be done?”

“I will wipe my coat myself; an operation, Mr. Buxton, which I suppose I need not inform you, I shall be the first Earl of Renfrewshire, out of a long line of ancestors bearing that title, who ever condescended to perform before.”

Napkins in abundance were now brought, and the earl, with a pompous gravity, took off his coat, divested himself of his ribbon, which he never omitted an occasion of wearing, so fond was he of exhibiting it, and with a rueful face and many a sigh, commenced wiping it.

“Here are the ribbons for your lordship to take your choice,” said a footman presenting a silver waiter, on which were spread out divers sashes of every hue, appertaining to the Misses Buxton. The man had heard the offer made by his mistress to the peer, and in his officiousness to obey her wishes, had not waited to hear

the stern and somewhat contemptuous refusal made to it.

“Take them away, take them away,” said the earl, growing even more red in the face than before, and waving his hand with an air of offended dignity.

“If your lordship’s linen is at all wet, I will instantly get you a shirt of mine,” said the obtuse Mr. Buxton, forgetting, or unconscious of, the offended dignity with which the offer of a coat had been declined.

“A *chemise* of your’s, Sir!” repeated Lord Renfrewshire, “good God!” and he absolutely shuddered at the bare notion.

Carefully did he wipe off the soup from his ribbon; but alas! the stain left behind was indelible, and with a pious care did he pass his perfumed handkerchief over the star of his order, almost groaning while he did so. Having removed the soup from his coat with his own hand, touching the napkins employed for the purpose as if his contact with them were disgusting and degrading to him, he held his coat before the fire, maintaining as erect a posture,

and as stern a silence as he could during the operation, broken only by half suppressed groans of horror.

“Now, Sir,” said he, “I believe I may put on my coat, and accompany you to the *salle à manger*.”

Mr. Buxton attempted to assist him to resume it, but he was waved off, with nearly as much dignity, as the offered services of the servant were declined, and having with some difficulty succeeded in donning it himself, the peer motioned to his host to follow, and walked back to the dining-room. The frequency of the display of his order, had often drawn on Lord Renfrewshire the ridicule of his acquaintances, and more especially of those amongst them who possessed not this distinction. His neighbours asserted that he could not partake a family dinner with them, or at his own house, without sporting this badge of the favour of his Sovereign, or of the complaisance of the Prime Minister. Nay, there were some of them who declared, his lordship wore it when he slept; but this was rather to be doubted, for Lady Renfrewshire possessed too much “decent dignity” to reveal the

secrets of the conjugal chamber, and his lordship would have deemed it an outrage to have suffered any one else to even guess them.

“Now that we are all right again,” said the host, taking his seat without ever thinking of apologizing to the noble ladies at each side of him, for his absence, “I must say that when I saw his lordship’s red ribbon nearly covered with the white soup, I was directly reminded of a lobster with a ‘*ma yor-nays*’ sauce (Mr. Buxton’s mode of pronouncing *mayonnaise*), as my French cook often serves it.”

A suppressed laugh broke from several of the guests at this extraordinary liberty, taken with one of the proudest men in England, and on so short an acquaintance, while all looked to see how the pompous peer would take it. The earl drew himself up with a haughty air, and darting a glance of contempt at his host, replied, “I know not which to admire most, Sir, your happiness in finding resemblances, or your tact and good taste in revealing them.”

Lady Renfrewshire looked daggers at Mr. Buxton, while expressing her hope that Lord

Renfrewshire's health would not suffer from the accident."

"I would not allow any thing to be removed, my lord," said Mrs. Buxton meekly, perceiving that the earl was offended, although she did not guess precisely at what, and anxious to atone for his annoyance.

"You are too good, Madam," observed he, bowing stiffly.

"Won't your lordship have some soup?"

"I could not, Madam, on any account allow the ladies present to be put to the inconvenience of waiting for the next course, while I had soup;" and he glanced at his host, who was swallowing his with all the gusto of a gourmand.

"You will at least take some fish, my lord? The turbot is good, and the other fish, I forget the name of it, is excellent."

"Excuse me, Madam, I have a great dislike to cold fish, except *en mayonnaise*."

"I'm really quite distressed that your lordship has had neither soup nor fish."

"I beg, Madam, that you will not give it a moment's thought."

Lord Forestville, noticing the haughty air and manner with which his brother peer received the well-meant, though not well-bred, attentions of Mrs. Buxton, attempted to lessen her visible embarrassment by entering into conversation with her. He talked of the fine scenery in the neighbourhood, enumerated the picturesque drives, spoke of gardening and flowers, praised her fine conservatory, and admirable hot-houses, but could get nothing more than a monosyllabic assent to his remarks. Her eyes wandered around the table "on hospitable thoughts intent," and with a zeal that did credit to her anxiety that her guests should fare well; although it exposed her to their animadversions on her ignorance of *les usages du monde*, she raised her naturally low voice to its loudest pitch to offer them the dainties spread before them.

"Do, my Lady, just taste the lamb cutlets with green peas, or perhaps your ladyship would prefer *free candour* (*fricandeau*) with sorrel. Lady Forestville, won't you have some *role rond* (*vol-au-vent*). Lady Marchmount," (leaving out the Emily,—a vulgarism that greatly

disgusted that fine lady, who never wished those she associated with to forget she was an earl's daughter, although, in consideration of his twenty thousand a-year, she had condescended to marry a baronet). "Lady Rosina, I beg you will eat some venison; and you, Lady Alicia, won't you try it? Mrs. Grimthorpe, let me send you some *pully à la rain, poulet à la Reine*). Do, pray, ask Miss Grimthorpe and Miss Stratford if they would like some?"

The generally pale face of the kind-hearted Mrs. Buxton became flushed almost to crimson, from the arduous duties in which she was engaged, and her elaborate discharge of them, so unlike the quiet *nonchalance* of ladies of fashion, when presiding at their tables, only served to draw on her the ridicule of her guests, and the contempt of her servants, whose *savoir faire* would have enabled them to fulfil their service so much better, had they been left to follow their usual routine, instead of being ordered about by one so inexperienced as their mistress.

"Good heavens! see how the poor hostess

flushes and pants," said the supercilious Mr. Morton Cavendish to his next neighbour. "The hostess of a country inn, presiding at a wedding or christening *fête*, never displayed more indefatigable zeal."

"*Que voulez-vous?*" was the reply; "what can be expected from *parvenues*, and above all, from such vulgar ones as the Buxtons?"

"Did you hear her offer Renfrewshire the *rain soup*? Was not that capital? But I forgive her all her sins against *les bienséances*, in consideration of her having caused the destruction, or desecration, as he termed it, of his ribbon of the Bath. I trust we shall be spared seeing its *remplacement*, for at least some time."

"You really are somewhat ill-natured," observed Lady Emily Marchmount.

"You can have no reason to dread ill-nature; for in you all is irreproachable, save and except a certain induration of the heart, which all, who can appreciate beauty and talent, must deplore."

"You are becoming quite sentimental, I declare, but have ill-chosen your time; for the long delay occasioned by Lord Renfrew-

shire's mischance, has greatly increased my appetite; and the *entrées* of Monsieur Mitonné, though grown rather tepid, are not to be despised in administering to its cravings. Philosophers assert that only one of our senses can be gratified at the same moment; so that while Mitonné, and he really is an excellent *artiste*, satisfies my hunger, even the delicate flattery of so able a professor of that art as you, affords not its usual delight to my ear."

"I wish women would eat more at luncheon," observed Mr. Morton Cavendish, "provided always that I am not present at the operation; for I have as great a horror of seeing them feed as Byron had. But a copious luncheon would leave them at liberty to converse during dinner; and conversation is a great assistant to digestion."

"Then you were looking at conversation more from the physical advantage, than the moral *agrément* to be derived from it," remarked Lady Emily Marchmount, sarcastically.

"Accurate observer, acute reasoner, profound philosopher!" said the gentleman, with an in-

sidious smile. "One half forgets the rare beauty of the shining casket, when the bright treasures of mind it holds are suffered to flash on us."

"You grow quite poetical, Mr. Morton Cavendish; but I think you have partly stolen your graceful simile of 'shining casket,' from Moore."

"Don't imagine anything so dreadful, dear Lady Emily. In pity don't. Why, if I don't mistake, that poet flourished, as they call it, some forty years ago; and I never read anything obsolete. How you, *so young*," and he laid a peculiar emphasis on the two monosyllables, "could ever have heard of him, I can't guess, for he must have been long out of fashion before your noble parents had left their respective nurseries."

The cheeks of Lady Emily grew of a brighter red than the slight *soupçon* of rouge, so artistically laid on, could account for. She felt the malice of the speech; for, conscious that she wished to pass for being at least ten years younger than she really was, a deception supported by sending a false statement to every

new edition of a certain perfidious book, entitled, "The Peerage," she had some doubts that the real state of the case was more than surmised, and eschewed, as much as possible, every reference to the subject.

While this conversation was passing between Lady Emily and Mr. Morton Cavendish, the ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray, extremely displeased at having no beaux invited to meet them, vented their anger by sundry contemptuous glances at Selina, who sate at the opposite side of the table. "I should like to know who that person, sitting next Mrs. Grimthorpe, is?" said Lady Rosina, addressing herself to the General.

"I don't wonder at your curiosity; for the young lady is extremely handsome," was the reply.

"I don't agree with you, for I think her a very common-place sort of girl; and I dare say she is some damsel from one of the manufacturing towns, the daughter, probably, of a cotton-printer or cutler, and most likely a relation of our *distinguée* hostess."

“ Well, although Mrs. Buxton may be, and is, I dare say, a very worthy woman, I should never dream of calling her *distinguée*,” replied the good old General, who, with many excellent and estimable qualities, possessed little powers of discrimination, and was so matter-of-fact, that he took *au pied de la lettre* all that was said to him.

“ How very odd,” said Lady Rosina. “ But then you are so very fastidious, General, and no wonder, accustomed as you are to perfection in your own family:” and, unseen by the General, she smiled maliciously.

“ You are very good to think so,” Lady Rosina, I am sure,” observed the pleased old man. “ It is true, Mrs. Grimthorpe and my daughter are all that I could desire; still I am not so foolish as to suppose that they are, as you assert, perfection.”

“ Don’t you think it was very original of our host and hostess to invite so many more women than men to dinner? never calculating how those ladies, who had no gentlemen to hand them out to dinner, were to get to the *salle à manger*.”

“It was an oversight, I must admit; but my good wife remedied it famously. There is no one like her for getting out of a difficulty.”

“I suppose our host and hostess calculated on this peculiar characteristic of Mrs. Grimthorpe,” said Lady Rosina, sneeringly, “when they invited six gentlemen and nine ladies, and out of the six only one unmarried man, Mr. Morton Cavendish, who is so insupportable, that he is likely to be a bachelor all his life.”

“Do let me recommend you a little *fricandeau*,” said Mrs. Grimthorpe to Miss Stratford. “You really eat nothing; and as I have taken charge of you I must not let you starve.”

During the whole dinner the good-natured woman attended most kindly to the young person she had taken under her charge, whose mild countenance and gentleness had interested her.

“How long have you been in this part of the world?” inquired Mrs. Grimthorpe, whose besetting sin was curiosity.

“I arrived only to-day, madam.”

“Indeed! You are come, I hope, to make some stay?”

“ I trust so ! ”

“ You are a near relation of Mr. or Mrs. Buxton, I suppose ? ”

“ No, Madam, I have not that honour. ”

“ The daughter of an old friend, I conclude. ”

“ No, Madam ; my parents were not known to Mr. or Mrs. Buxton. ”

“ How very odd, that being neither related, nor your family known to the Buxtons, that you should find yourself domiciled with them. How is this ? ”

“ I am come as governess. ”

“ As governess ! ” reiterated Mrs. Grimthorpe ; not *sotto voce*, but in a tone so loud as to be heard by many of the persons around her, including the Ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray.

“ Well, I hope you will be comfortable, ” resumed Mrs. Grimthorpe good naturedly ; and to her credit be it said, that her attentions to Selina rather increased than relaxed from the discovery of her position in Mrs. Buxton’s family.

“ Only fancy these vulgar persons having

their governess at table with *us*," said Lady Rosina. "It is quite enough that we should tolerate them, without associating with their dependents."

"The young lady appears to be a very nice lady-like person, and very pretty into the bargain," replied General Grimthorpe. "I have seen persons with less beauty, and distinction of manner and air, make great marriages; and I shouldn't wonder if in this case a similar good fortune might occur. We old soldiers, though often accused of being martinets, are never surprised at promotion from the ranks when merit justifies it, and promotion to a higher station, won by beauty and goodness, we view in the same light."

"You are very indulgent, General; nevertheless I am of opinion that the person opposite—I forget her name—has very little chance of the good fortune you half prophesy for her. Men, that is to say young men, are not such fools now-a-days; and pretty governesses, like pretty ladies' maids, are seldom, if ever, raised from the ranks, as you call it."

A general move, indicating that the ladies were leaving the room, prevented further comments from the spiteful Lady Rosina; but no sooner had she entered the drawing room than she retired to an ottoman with her sister the Lady Alicia, where their congenial minds gave free vent to their indignation at Mrs. Buxton's having intruded into their society a person whose subordinate position rendered her so unfit for such an honour. Miss Grimthorpe took a seat by Selina, and soon engrossed her in a lively and agreeable conversation, in which, if much of the old soldier frankness of the father, with the good-natured curiosity of the mother, peeped forth, the amalgamation contained so much good sense and unaffected kindness, as to interest Selina greatly in favour of her new acquaintance.

CHAPTER XI.

POOR Mrs. Buxton was as little at her ease, in her splendid drawing-room, as at the head of her dinner-table. Her anxiety to discharge the duties of an attentive hostess, combined with her ignorance of, in what these duties consisted, rendered her fidgetty and fussy, and prevented her lady guests from enjoying that *laissez aller* and freedom from ceremonious constraint, which formed the peculiar attraction of that house in the bachelor days of the former owner.

“What fine Sèvres china you possess,” said Lady Forestville, glancing at some vases of that celebrated manufactory, of great value.

“Are they very good?” inquired Mrs. Buxton. “I am no judge of china, except Staffordale, which I think very beautiful.”

The ladies looked at each other in astonishment at this *naïve* confession; and Lady Renfrewshire, provoked into malice by the affront she conceived herself to have received, from Mr. Buxton's leading out Lady Forestville to dinner, determined to avenge on the wife the offence given by the husband, thus addressed her, "Of course you admire buhl?"

"Bulls," repeated Mrs. Buxton. "No, I can't say I do. I am rather afraid of them, since one of the poor women in the neighbourhood was tossed by one a short time ago; but I like cows."

This blunder produced a laugh from all, except Mrs. Grimthorpe, her daughter, and Selina, who, displeased at the ridicule heaped on their hostess, marked their disapproval by their gravity. "Ah! I see, ladies, you are amused by my cowardice," said Mrs. Buxton, wholly unconscious of the real cause of the risibility in which her guests indulged; "but you must remember I never lived in the country until I came here."

"Perhaps you prefer marqueterie," resumed

Lady Renfrewshire, desirous to expose still further the ignorance of her hostess.

“Marketting, did your ladyship say?” inquired Mrs. Buxton. “I used to like marketting very much. I think it is very pleasant to choose butter, eggs, poultry, fish, and meat, oneself, instead of being imposed on, as one always is, by servants.”

A stifled laugh followed this mistake.

“I see you have some fine specimens of *Pietra Duro*,” observed Lady Renfrewshire.

“Peter Douro, I never heard of him before,” replied Mrs. Buxton, “who is he?”

This innocent question set the ladies into a general titter, in which they were freely indulging when the gentlemen entered the drawing-room, and checked their hilarity. “Did you ever meet such ignorance?” whispered Lady Forestville. “Never except in the husband,” replied Lady Renfrewshire, “he really is too bad.”

“I was quite horrified at his persistance in taking me out to dinner instead of you,” observed Lady Forestville, “and did all I could to set him right, but he is impracticable.”

“What dreadful people to have for neighbours! we must manage to see as little of them as possible.”

“Yes, but not offend them, for his interest in the county will be useful.”

Never passed evening more heavily, and difficult would it be to decide whether the givers or receivers of the party suffered the most *ennui*. Glad were both, when the carriages were announced, to be released from the infliction they had been mutually enduring, and they separated, both parties longing to express without restraint the distaste they had imbibed towards each other.

The unaffected kindness and simplicity of Mrs. Buxton soon completely won the good will of Selina. She saw that a desire of rendering herself more *au fait* of the usages of society, and of acquiring a little more ease of manner, had induced this good-natured but ignorant woman to seek a governess for herself rather than for her children, who were yet too young to profit by the instructions of one; and she only regretted that her own inexperience rendered her less capable

of being serviceable to her. Nevertheless, little as Selina had seen of society, her education, reading, and above all, the time passed with the elegant and highly polished Lady Almondbury, had taught her to maintain a lady-like demeanour and manner, of which Mrs. Buxton stood greatly in need, and which she in return for kindness would gladly if possible teach her to acquire. The task she felt would not be an easy one, for to an unconquerable dislike to reading, were added other impediments, Mrs. Buxton being wholly deficient in talent, narrow-minded, prone to court the great, and to defer to their opinion on every subject, while professing to be careless of it. She loved her husband and her children fondly, because, as she with great *naïveté* was wont to acknowledge, they were hers; but here closed the circle of her affections, there was no room for any new one. But though Selina soon perceived that she could not hope to render Mrs. Buxton other than a very common-place person, she took such pains to convey instruction to her, and to simplify it as much as possible, that gradually, though by slow

degrees, the deportment and manners of that lady became less objectionable. When confidence had replaced the constraint of the first few weeks, Mrs. Buxton referred to the scene of the dinner on the first day's arrival of Selina. "Now do tell me, my dear Miss Stratford, whether I was not right in thinking that Lady Renfrewshire, her daughters, and indeed all the other great ladies, with the exception of Mrs. and Miss Grimthorpe, were turning me into ridicule that day? I felt they were, yet I did not know what blunders I was committing, though some I guessed I must have been guilty of, from the manner in which they laughed whenever I spoke. You may remember how they screamed with laughter when I spoke of bulls, and marketing, and Peter Douro! which I only did because they introduced the subjects."

Selina walked with her through the richly decorated rooms, pointed out the buhl cabinets, and explained to her that the name was given owing to the first manufacturer being named Buhl. "Oh! my dear Miss Stratford, how stupid and ignorant I must have appeared in

their eyes," and Mrs. Buxton's cheeks grew red as she made the reflection; "and yet," resumed she, "how much kinder it would have been of them to have told me what you have now explained. And about the marketting, what made them laugh so much?" When told that marqueterie was furniture composed of inlaid woods of various colours, specimens of which were pointed out to her, she blushed at her former mistake; "But tell me, who was Peter Douro?" inquired she, "for when I named him you must have remarked how they laughed. I do assure you, my dear Miss Stratford, that I felt so much ashamed and embarrassed that I knew not which way to look. Oh! the pain of seeing that in one's own house one is made a laughing stock of, without being able to guess why, is dreadful, and makes one wish that one was back again in one's humble home, among kind friends who would neither mock nor laugh at one."

When a fine table, inlaid with *Pietra Duro* was pointed out to its simple owner, and that she understood what the two words signified

she remarked on the unkindness of blaming her ignorance of a language she had never been taught, and of articles of furniture, never seen by her, until her entrance in the mansion now her own.

“Oh! do pray, dear Miss Stratford, teach me the names of all these things. You will find me a docile, if not a quick scholar,” said the simple hearted and unpretending Mrs. Buxton, “for though I am not a vain or proud woman, God forbid I should be, I have some feeling, and dread becoming an object of ridicule to those with whom I am to associate. What a different notion I had of grandees; I thought they were condescending, and indulgent, more especially to those who were unpretending and simple like myself. But I suppose all are not like those in this neighbourhood. Did you notice how cross and offended Lord Renfrewshire looked when I offered him one of my little girls’ sashes to replace his red ribband? I meant the offer kindly, and if he has such a foolish fancy as to wear a ribband over his waistcoat, which I never saw any one do before, surely one ribband would be as good as another.”

Glad was Selina to be enabled, through her residence with her kind departed patroness, Lady Almondbury, to give Mrs. Buxton much information acquired beneath the roof of that admirable woman. In her princely mansion, filled with objects of *vertu* of the most costly description; its walls covered with family portraits bearing the orders of the Garter, the Bath, and the Golden Fleece, she had heard Lady Almondbury explain to her daughter the names of each specimen of art, and the different badges of distinction, displayed on the costumes of her ancestors; and Selina had eagerly profited by the instruction designed for her pupil.

“You know every thing, dear Miss Stratford,” observed Mrs. Buxton, “and how fortunate may I consider myself in having found so kind a monitress. One who will instruct without laughing at my ignorance.”

The information derived from Selina was in secret conveyed by Mrs. Buxton to her husband, and often was the governess amused by hearing him say, “What was the name you

told me, my dear, of this?" laying his hand on a splendid cabinet of *pietra dura*.

"Tell him, dear Miss Stratford," would Mrs. Buxton say; "for you pronounce the words so nicely."

"I can remember the names of the other things by thinking of a bull, or of marketing," observed Mr. Buxton, laughing; "but the different kinds of fine cheney puzzles me."

"Sèvres, my dear, *old* Sèvres, that is the finest of all China; is not it, Miss Stratford? Then comes *old* Dresden."

"But why must it be old to be fine?"

"Yes, dear Miss Stratford, I forgot to inquire, as my husband has done, why must it be old?"

"Because the modern is far inferior in quality to the old, which, being generally sought after, has become much more rare, and expensive."

"Well, as long as I'm not called on to admire old women, I don't care about admitting the superiority of old china; though I must say, that as, in modern times, we have improved in

the manufacture of other articles, I don't see why we should not have progressed in that of china."

"Perhaps that's the same as in pictures, my dear," observed Mrs. Buxton. "You heard Lady Forestville say that her gallery was considered to contain the finest collection of pictures in the county, and all by the ancient masters."

"And more shame for her, too," replied Mr. Buxton. "How are the artists of our own time to live, if people will only buy the works of old masters, I should like to know? Pretty encouragement for rising talent! It's my opinion, that, if all the old pictures in this county were burnt, it would be the happiest thing for painting, as well as for painters, that could happen. You would see what our own artists would then do, not that I think they do amiss now. Let me see any picture of the ancients that can show such birds, or animals, as Landseer's,—ay, or such honest country faces. He puts such a life and a meaning into them, that even I who, God knows, am no judge, can't help seeing

that, on his canvass, there's truth and nature caught in the fact, as I may say. Then look at Frank Grant's portraits! Why, hang me if he does not give the very men and women just as God made them. Look at Maclise's pictures, what richness of fancy, what excellence in drawing; and there's many other great painters of our own time that I could mention. And then tell me that people, with plenty of money, will only have old pictures in their galleries. Why, when I see these old brown shining things, that cover the walls of all the rooms in this house, and which I am told cost my predecessor such mints of money, I heartily wish they were away, and that in their places I had the productions of the best of our own artists. And so I soon would have; but that my cousin has made the pictures here heir-looms. I declare it's quite a trouble, instead of a pleasure, to gaze on them. Look at one side, and they remind you of one of those hideous Daguerotypes, which you must twist and turn, in heaven only knows how many lights, before you can seize the likeness. You see a mass of brown

and dark yellow on the canvass, without being able to distinguish objects. You move away to another point, still you don't get to the right view ; and, after having shifted your position from one spot to another, at last you see the picture, just as you do an old woman, all the worse for wear."

There was a raciness and originality in the mind and manners of Mr. Buxton, that often amused Selina, although they rendered him unsuited to the habits and notions of his aristocratic neighbours. He was not like his more docile wife, disposed to adopt their refined ideas, or cold and reserved behaviour. He laughed in derision at their fastidiousness ; and, as he became more accustomed to their society, felt less respect for their opinions. With Mrs. Buxton it was otherwise. When she accepted invitations to their feudal mansions, she was deeply impressed with the air of massive grandeur that reigned around. The hangings, the pictures, the statues, the plate, the furniture, all seemed nearly coeval with the houses ; yet in such a state of perfect preservation, that

time had only served to give a finer tone to the whole, without at all impairing the beauty. These splendid possessions, which had for centuries passed from father to son, vouching for a long line of noble ancestry, had a very imposing effect on Mrs. Buxton, and prevented her from feeling that ease in the society of "those grantees," as her husband denominated them, without which social intercourse must always be irksome. She marked with surprise the perfect *savoir faire* with which the ladies of these stately mansions presided at their tables, leaving the offering of the various *plats* to the well-drilled servants, who glided around the table as noiseless as ghosts; the hostesses not to be distinguished from their female guests, by any fussy attentions to the wants or wishes of these last. She now discovered that giving great dinners might impose much less trouble on a mistress of a house, with a large establishment, than she had previously been wont to imagine, and reflected with *mauvaise honte*, how strange these titled dames must have thought her unceasing attention to them when they had dined with her.

Something of this she confided to the ear of the husband.

“Stuff! nonsense, my dear,” said he. “They may be as fine as they like, and think it all right not to take any more notice of their guests than if the whole party were dining at an ordinary, where every one is for himself, and takes no heed of his neighbour. But I prefer the warm cordiality of those we used to live with, before we came to our present fortune, and I should be sorry to see you lose it.”

Mrs. Buxton was surprised that Selina’s name was never included in any of the invitations sent to her, and at first felt more than half-disposed to resent what she deemed an incivility, and to decline accepting them. Selina overruled this intention, and explained the general position of a governess in a family.

“What a shame,” observed Mrs. Buxton, “to exclude a young lady from society, because she is performing duties, to be enabled to discharge which, she must have received an education that would fit her for the very best.”

Mrs. Grimthorpe, alone, included Selina in

the card of invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Buxton; but Selina, dreading to be exposed to the supercilious treatment, experienced from the Ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray, declined the invitation, although warmly pressed to accept it by Mrs. Buxton. How tranquilly and happily passed those evenings, when Mr. and Mrs. Buxton, absent from home, left the governess at liberty to pass the too fleeting hours, employed in reading in the well-stored library. Solitude, instead of being irksome, possessed an irresistible charm for her, and glad and thankful would she have been to enjoy it more frequently. With every creature comfort,—nay, surrounded by luxuries which she was cordially welcomed to partake,—the total dearth of all intellectual intercourse, and the engrossment of her whole time by Mrs. Buxton, to the utter impossibility of devoting even a few hours to the perusal of the choice books now within her reach, were heavily felt by Selina. In vain she sought by early rising to snatch an hour for her studies; Mrs. Buxton was as *matinale* as herself, and was no sooner dressed, than she summoned Selina

to her presence. Miss Stratford must walk with her, to visit the conservatory, the pet-dairy, the poultry-yard, and the flower-garden. She must preside at the breakfast-table, read, and explain the *menu*, and interpret between the French *maître d'hôtel* and his employers. She must then accompany Mrs. Buxton to the nursery, to pay her diurnal visit to the children; after which must sit and chat with that lady while she worked (Mrs. Buxton was a great worker), for she liked to talk, and be talked to, while her fingers pursued their rotatory routine; but she graciously permitted Selina to draw, or embroider, if she wished it, only making a condition that the flow (not of soul, but) of words should not be interrupted.

“I can’t bear to work without chatting,” would she say; “it is so very dull;” and so an inane and desultory conversation was carried on, the topics being for the most part furnished by reflections on the clever sayings and interesting doings of the children, the domineering manner of their upper nurse, and the luxuries enjoyed by the supine housekeeper, and fine-ladyish *femme de chambre*. “I assure you, dear

Miss Stratford, that they are much better off than I was before we came to our fortune, and give themselves much more airs than ladies do," would the unsophisticated mistress of the mansion repeat, day after day, until the facts, strengthened by personal experience, became so impressed on the mind of Selina, that the reiteration of them almost induced a state of drowsiness. The luncheon-bell alone interrupted this daily *tête-à-tête*, and an hour was devoted to discussing the culinary dainties served up by *Monsieur le Chef de Cuisine*,—an hour that seemed interminably tardy in its flight to Selina, whose appetite rejected this extra repast, but which Mrs. Buxton approved, the hour for partaking it being, as she seldom omitted to state, *sotto voce*, to Selina, that at which she was accustomed to dine in her former home.

After luncheon the carriage was announced, and Selina must accompany Mrs. Buxton in her daily drive; listen to the same monotonous monologue, interrupted only by her own monosyllabic assents; and return home as jaded as if the long promenade had been a pedestrian one.

Then a second visit to the nursery, where she was expected to remain until it was time to dress for dinner, at which *recherché* repast, where digestion was not assisted by cheerful converse or lively sallies (as recommended by the wise epicureans of old), two of the longest and most wearisome hours in the twenty-four were passed. Mr. Buxton related his exploits by flood and field, being greatly addicted to fishing and shooting; told how fishes were snared, and birds, or rabbits, shot, with great satisfaction to himself at least, if not to his auditors, the novelty of such sports to him giving them a peculiar zest. "I must, however," would he say, with a solemn shake of the head, and a portentous brow, "see that my game be more strictly preserved in future. I must make a few examples of these abominable poachers, and prevent my farmers from sporting, or all my shooting will be spoilt."

"You surely can't mean, my dear, to do that which I have so frequently heard you censure others for doing," said his wife, with a face full of astonishment. "Don't you remember when you

went on a visit to your cousin, Mr. Everfield, how angry you were when his landlord, the Marquis of Hungerford, refused to allow you to shoot on your cousin's farm? and how hard you thought it that he should prosecute poachers with such severity."

"That may be all very well, when a man has no preserves, or large manors of his own; but you know the old proverb, 'a fellow feeling makes one wondrous kind!' and hang me if I would not feel well disposed to punish, with the utmost severity the law will admit, any of those rascals that poach on my property!"

"Well, you surprise me, my dear, after all I have heard you say, when you used to call the Marquis of Hungerford a proud, overbearing aristocrat, who seemed to think that pheasants and partridges were only to be shot by him and his peers."

"I dare say I uttered many foolish things in the days to which you refer, Sarah, for I was then a poor devil that envied the rich their possessions; but wealth, when it comes to us, makes us see most things in a different point of view."

CHAPTER XII.

SUCH were the conversations that generally passed after dinner, when the servants had withdrawn. During their presence Mrs. Buxton was too timid to be communicative, and her *caro sposo* too much occupied in rendering justice to the excellent cookery set before him, to talk much. But oh, the long, long evenings that followed! When Selina entered the library, a torpor seemed to oppress her spirits, in anticipation of the dull and tedious hours that must intervene before she was released for the night. Mr. Buxton took up a newspaper, with the avowed intention of perusing its contents; but scarcely had he glanced over half a dozen lines ere his eyelids gently closed, and, in a few minutes, certain loud nasal sounds announced that he had yielded to the influence of the God

of sleep. Mrs. Buxton would, on such occasions, steal on tip-toe to the side of the easy chair or sofa, where he had ensconced his person, and carefully cover his head with her scarf, contemplating him, while doing so, with the same complacent smile with which the fond mother of an only child gazes on her slumbering treasure. "I am so afraid he may catch cold; or, that he is not well," would she whisper to Selina. He never was accustomed to sleep after dinner in our old home, but used to be as brisk and lively as a cricket, and chat with me."

"He had not then an excellent cook to tempt his appetite, nor rare wines and *liqueurs* to wash down his too copious repasts," thought Selina, a reflection so natural and obvious, that she was surprised it had not occurred to the anxious wife. Mrs. Buxton was not however given to trace effect to cause, and loved her husband too fondly to reason on aught that indicated a change in his health or habits.

There sat the kind-hearted woman, casting from time to time anxious glances at the sleeper, and by no means shocked nor incommoded by

his loud snoring, while Selina, engaged with tapestry work, undertaken by the desire of Mrs. Buxton, plied her task, contrasting the present dull and gloomy evenings, unbroken by reading or conversation, with the happy ones passed in the refined society of the elegant and cultivated Lady Almondbury, or in the cheerful ones spent beneath the humble roof of her worthy friends, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon. Often would she sigh when casting her eyes around on the well-filled book shelves. She thought of the treasures they contained—treasures she longed to possess, if but for a few brief hours—but which were wholly disregarded by their owners.

“I shall have my fourth flower done before he awakes,” would Mrs. Buxton say; “I wish, however, we could talk while we work, that would make the evenings seem shorter; but I am so afraid of awaking him.”

Glad was Selina when released for the night; and truly did she comprehend that the luxuries of life must be valueless where all intellectual pleasures are wanting. Often did

she accuse herself of ingratitude to Providence for feeling so acutely the want of leisure for reading, and the dearth of all rational intercourse in her present abode. Thankful for the invariable good nature of Mr. Buxton towards her, and for the extreme kindness of his wife, she was vexed with herself for not being able to submit with more cheerfulness to the irksomeness of their society.

“ Could I have but a few hours to myself in the day,” would she often exclaim, “ I might better bear the long and weary hours I must spend with my employer; but to be all day pinned to her side, every evening working, uncheered by a sound save the drowsy whispers of Mrs. Buxton, and the snoring of her husband, is an infliction that makes me forget the solid comforts of my situation, and how much I have to be thankful for in their kindness.”

Two days after Selina had made the foregoing reflections, a letter apprised her of the death of her worthy friend Mrs. Vernon, who had expired after an illness of only a few days, leaving the faithful partner of her life a solitary

sojourner on earth, bowed down by affliction. Deeply did this new stroke of adversity fall on her; and in her sorrow every selfish feeling of her own loss in this sad event was lost sight of in her pity and sympathy for the bereaved husband. Who now was to cheer his solitary hearth, for so many years the scene of rational enjoyment and comfort? Who was to partake his daily meals? to care for their being always prepared exactly according to his taste, and to enliven them by cheerful converse, and affectionate smiles, not less the result of one of the sweetest tempers, and finest natures that ever mortal was blessed with, than of a love that had from youth to age formed the basis of their mutual happiness? Who now was to talk to him of his youthful days? of those trials that had only served to endear them still more to each other? of those friends who had long departed from earth, yet who were remembered with the fondness with which friends of youth are ever recalled? His long fled youth, ay, and even its pleasant reminiscences, now were gone with her who had constituted the happiness

of both ; and a solitary, cheerless existence must henceforth be his, until summoned to join her he had lost. Gladly would Selina have gone to that now desolate house, which had hitherto been her refuge and home when needed ; but with a timidity peculiar to persons in dependent positions, she knew not whether such a step might not involve results to be avoided. Mr. Vernon might think himself now bound to retain her, should she, as was probable, lose her situation by going to him. She had no claim of relationship to warrant such a proceeding ; and she shrank from the thought of becoming a tax on his bounty. Many were the tears that fell on the letter she addressed to him on this occasion, every syllable it contained emanating from a heart filled with regret and sympathy for his affliction.

“ Was Mrs. Vernon a near relation ? ” asked Mrs. Buxton when she marked the traces of grief on the face of Selina.

“ No, Madam, none whatever.”

“ How very odd ; I thought one only mourned a near cousin, so deeply as you do.

I have such a number of relations, that I never formed any intimate friendships with other persons. It's a great comfort to have a number of relations, for out of a large lot, one can choose one's friends."

Mrs. Buxton knew not how this thoughtless and common-place reflection of hers made Selina more alive to her own isolated position in life. *She* had no relations nor connexions from whom to select friends, or from whom to claim countenance or protection. She stood alone in the world, with no friend to count on, save Mr. Vernon, an aged man; and when he should be removed from earth, she should indeed be left friendless. As these sad thoughts passed through her mind, a ray of comfort was admitted into it, by the belief that, with those with whom she was at present dwelling, she might count on a quiet and assured, though not a happy home; and, after a conscientious discharge of her duties for some years, merit and win their esteem and friendship. They seemed good and kind-hearted; and why might she not hope to attach them to her by ties of

regard, and habits of long and daily intercourse, warmed, at last, into friendship. Yes! she would no more, with a repining spirit, sink into gloom at the monotony and want of all intellectual enjoyment of her existence. She would be thankful for the good nature shown to her, and be patient, if not satisfied, with her lot.

How blind are mortals to the future, and how little can they count even on the present! While Selina was calculating on a diligent exercise of her abilities in her present abode, and on the good results likely to emanate from such conduct, Fate, through the medium of one of the ignoble tools often empowered to work its decrees, was busy at work to defeat the hopes of the poor orphan. Mrs. Price, the head nurse of Mrs. Buxton, had usurped an influence over that lady from the moment she entered her service, until the arrival of Selina. The reign was one of terror, and though felt to be such, was endured by the timid and ignorant Mrs. Buxton, from the awe inspired in her mind by the stern, and often insolent, airs of the termagant.

Taking advantage of her inexperience, nurse dictated the laws and regulations of the nursery, according to the mode, as she asserted, adopted by the duchess of this, and marchioness of that, her suggestions scarcely allowing the frightened Mrs. Buxton to have a voice in the management of her own children, or an entrance into the nursery, except at stated hours, named by Mrs. Price. The airs of importance assumed by this vulgar woman towards her employer, often amounting to positive insolence, had been checked by the presence of Selina, and without her Mrs. Buxton now never entered the nursery. The nurse saw at a glance that Miss Stratford was not a person to submit to the impertinence offered with impunity to Mrs. Buxton, or to let that lady remain long in error with regard to the necessity of putting a stop to the insolence of the head nurse, as she loved to style herself. Her place was too lucrative a one to be lost: she had higher wages, and many more perquisites, acquired owing to the ignorance of her present mistress of the customs and usages of the rich and great, than she had ever enjoyed

in the noble families whose high-sounding titles she was wont to quote to the *parvenue*, as precedents on every occasion. To lose her place was therefore not to be thought of, and yet to be compelled to treat a nobody, an ignorant upstart, as she termed her mistress, with the respect paid to duchesses, marchionesses, and countesses, was an alternative almost equally repugnant to her feelings. If Miss Stratford could only be got rid of, all might go on as before. *She* might retain her place and her empire, and, with the other upper servants of the establishment, continue to take advantage of, and profit by, the ignorance of their employers. It did not enter into her head that another governess would inevitably take the place of Miss Stratford, if that young lady could be got rid of, or if so, she trusted to the chance, that the new comer might be less likely to interfere with her views than the present. The truth was, Selina's reserve had increased her dread and hatred. But how was Miss Stratford to be got rid of? Ay, there was the difficulty; for, from the great liking it was quite evident

Mrs. Buxton had taken to her, and the great use she was of in teaching that lady, Mrs. Nurse felt it would be no easy task to dislodge her. If she knew anything of the former life of Miss Stratford—in what families she had lived, how long or short a time she had remained in each—it would be easy to invent some tale (Mrs. Price had a wonderful fertility of imagination) which might get her sent away. Mrs. Nurse pondered long and deeply on this subject.

How provoking that Miss Stratford had no maid! and for the first time Mrs. Price regretted that governesses were not permitted such luxuries, for had a maid been in the case, how easily could she have learned every particular, of not only what the servant knew, but also what she imagined; and how soon a structure of falsehood could be erected on a small base of truth, none knew better. Mrs. Nurse kept up a frequent correspondence with a nephew of hers, a young man named Stubbings, a clerk in a solicitor's office. This nephew greatly resembled his aunt in more than one of his

propensities—he liked gossip, and particularly scandal; had a lively imagination for giving a high colour to the tales he repeated, and sometimes won golden opinions in the shape of half-sovereigns, sent up under the seal from his aunt, in return for the gossip he sent her down in his letters. She was proud to show the good writing, the decent letter-paper, the seal with a crest of a lion rampant, her own gift, impressed on the letters from this nephew, and proud also to show the address of her's to him in return, with the “Esq.” never forgotten.—“Who knows,” thought Mrs. Price, “but Jim may be able to find out something about this girl. She has sufficient good looks to have excited attention, and her name is not so common a one as to be mistaken or forgotten. Jim Stubbings knows something of every one; he is such a sharp clever lad that no one can find out things like him. What a fool I was not to think of it before. Yes, I’ll write to him at once, and tell him to make enquiries.” The letter was despatched, and in due course of time an answer received.

“You say that I know everything, dear aunt,” wrote the hopeful nephew, “and I really begin to think I do: but that’s all owing to having my wits kept continually rubbed up in the office, where we have more sharp practice than in most other solicitors’ offices in London.—Tell me Miss Stratford’s christian name, for without that, I cannot be certain in my information. The search, too, will cost me something in hack cabs and in treats, for no one will tell anything without being treated, and I am very low in cash just now; indeed, I generally am, and there is no clerk in the office, (and we have no less than ten,) who is so ill off as I am. You don’t know how hard I find it to keep up the appearance of a gentleman, without doing which, I should be looked down on directly by my fellow-clerks.—Your affectionate nephew,

JAMES STUBBINGS.”

“He’s a deep dog,” exclaimed his aunt, when she had perused the letter, “he knows how to touch me on the tender point, for it’s

the great wish of my heart to make him a gentleman, and to be able to say I have a nephew a solicitor. And a pretty sum it has cost me too, to make him what he is. Well, well, it can't be helped, it costs almost as much to make a gentleman as to maintain one: but he'll soon be able to set up for himself, and when I can see a brass plate on his door with Mr. Stubbings, solicitor, engraved on it, I'll be happy. I'll send him up a couple of sovereigns. But how am I to find out Miss Stratford's christian name? She's always spoken to and of, as Miss Stratford. I'll go to the laundry and see the name on her linen. But that'll be only an initial, and that's no great use. I'll get Miss Buxton to ask her name; yes, that's a good thought. "My dear, my dear," and the wily nurse addressed the eldest of the children under her care, "mind when Miss Stratford comes here to-day, you ask her what's her name."

"Her name is Miss Stratford," replied the child.

"Yes, but she has another name too. Your

name is Miss Buxton, but you have also another name, you are called Sarah."

"But I don't want to know Miss Stratford's other name; and mamma said, little girls must not ask questions."

"Stupid little brute!" murmured Mrs. Price, *sotto voce*. "How she takes after her mother. But if I give you a nice new doll for asking Miss Stratford's name?"

"Oh! if you give me a pretty doll, I'll ask Miss Stratford's name."

"Now, mind you don't forget."

"No, I'll not forget the doll."

No sooner had Selina entered the nursery that day, than the little girl ran up to her, and pulling her robe, exclaimed, "Tell me your name,—tell me your name?"

"Selina, my dear," was the reply.

"Give me the pretty doll, Mrs. Price," said the child, running back to the nurse, whose face grew crimson at this *exposé* of her having prompted the question. But she need not have been alarmed. Neither Mrs Buxton, nor Selina, had the least suspicion that the question originated

in aught save the curiosity natural to children, and there the matter rested; the little girl that evening receiving the price of her docility, out of the hoard of dolls and toys taken from the children, to be doled out to them again as bribes, to effect the purposes of their artful and unprincipled nurse.

The next post conveyed to Mr. James Stubbings the name of Selina, with two sovereigns, and an entreaty for a speedy answer.

“The old lady is about some mischief, I’ll warrant me,” observed Mr. James Stubbings, when he saw the gold. “She’d never give me money, if she hadn’t some particular object in view. Never did the most loyal subjects love their sovereigns as I do mine,” continued he, repeating for the twentieth time an attempt at wit, perpetrated whenever his aunt sent him a coin with the impress of Majesty on it. “Well, but it’s odd enough, here is the very name that was in the settlement, drawn up in the office, of an annuity of one hundred a-year, from Lord Almondbury to Selina Stratford, spinster. I know his lordship well enough by character,

and a great libertine he is too, by all accounts. He wouldn't give Selina Stratford, spinster, one hundred a-year for her life, for nothing, I know. No, no! he's no such fool! But what can my precious old aunt have to do with this lady? Probably, the said Selina Stratford, spinster, is hard up for cash, and wants to sell or pawn the aforesaid annuity; and the old lady, who I have always suspected to be much better off in money matters than she lets out, is disposed to buy it. Well, no matter what the motive for her inquiries may be, I must answer them, and I am thankful to have made two sovereigns by the job."

"Oh, ho! my fine lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Nurse, as she laid down a letter from her hopeful nephew. "Much better than I expected. There's no occasion to invent any story here; it's all ready, cut and dried to the hand, as one may say. Yet who'd have thought it? and so young, too. Yes, yes, Jim is right; she wouldn't have got a lord making a settlement on her for nothing, I'd be bound. And I know something of *this* lord, too. I knew a pretty nurse-maid,

who lost her character in his house; and he gave her fifty pounds. I have heard what a sad rake and libertine he was. But this lady, so stuck up and reserved; giving herself airs to *me*, too, and pretending to be astonished and shocked, when I let out a little of my mind before her to Mrs. Buxton! *Won't* I get her out of the place before long, that's all? She'll find that I'm more than a match for her, or my name is not Sarah Price. Let me see how I had best set about it? If I tell it to Mrs. Buxton, she is so taken with her, that she won't believe a word of it; besides, she'd suspect me of jealousy, or some other such motive." Mrs. Price paused for some minutes, and then exclaimed,—“Yes, now I have it. I'll write an anonymous letter to Mr. Buxton, and another to his wife, telling them that the whole neighbourhood is surprised that they keep in their family a young person of such bad character, and who was known to be the mistress of Lord Almondbury, who settled a hundred a-year on her to get rid of her. I'll add, that, if they doubt the intelligence, they have only to apply

to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the solicitors, who drew up the settlement. I'll send the two letters in a disguised hand to my nephew, who will drop them in the post in London, and so all suspicion will be turned from me. Mrs. Buxton was expressing her surprise and regret, the other day to her maid, that no persons, except Mrs. Grimthorpe, had invited Miss Stratford to their houses. Just as if nobility ever invited governesses, and especially the governesses of such upstarts as these Buxtons. But that's all her ignorance, expecting such things. Now she'll be sure to think that the reason Miss Stratford has not been asked, is that the neighbours know all about her, and this will settle the matter; for, though she is a good-natured fool, she has not courage to keep any one in her house a single day, after hearing that the lords and ladies around here would not associate with her. She wants to pass for a lady; I can plainly see she does; and she knows that to appear to be one, she must not set herself up against her betters."

The two letters were written and despatched.

Mr. James Stubbings put them into the post, and in due time they reached their destination, where they produced an effect on the minds of their recipients, that might have satisfied to the utmost the malice of Mrs. Price.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR some time Mrs. Buxton was disposed to conceal from her husband the painful communication she had received. She had felt a growing attachment to Selina, whose gentleness and amiable manner had won her regard. Her society and conversation, at once instructive and amusing, had been a relief to the vapid mind of that lady, who now, by the alteration in her position, found herself obliged to confide to others those household occupations, and that nursery superintendence, which had formerly filled up her days and abridged their length. She was conscious that she had derived great advantages from her contact with Miss Stratford. She could now preside at her own table without committing any remarkable solecism in *les usages et bienséances* of civilized life, and be an

inoffensive, though not an amusing hostess in her drawing-room. She felt that she owed all this, and more, to Selina's unassuming and judicious instructions and advice, and not prone to be ungrateful, she would willingly have evinced her sense of the debt, by continued kindness to her. But, when the thought of what might be said among "the grandes" in her neighbourhood, if she continued to retain a person of suspected character, presented itself, her natural kindness of heart was vanquished. How often does the *qu'en dira-t-on*, that dread of common minds, take the place of judgment in influencing their decisions, and urge them to adopt a conduct very different to that which their own better feelings would dictate! "And yet," said Mrs. Buxton, as she again and again perused the anonymous letter, "it is difficult to believe that a fallen woman could be so modest in her demeanour, so perfectly correct in her manner!" Never would a doubt of her propriety have entered my thoughts. After this, who can I ever trust? so good, so irreproachable as she seemed."

Mrs. Buxton made a very common mistake in this reasoning. Many suppose that every good quality departs, when chastity, that most essential of feminine virtues, no longer sanctifies the temple that should enshrine it. But the examples are not few of modesty surviving to mourn the death of her sister, virtue, and of a consciousness of having sinned, rendering those who feel it, more anxious to cultivate every other womanly virtue, in order to atone, if possible, for the loss of that which is the greatest of them all. Hence the erroneous opinions entertained of those who have sinned; and who, therefore, are believed to be as immodest as they are sinful.

“Yes, I must show this letter to my husband,” said Mrs. Buxton, after long debating the point with herself; “it would not be right to keep it from him: men know the world better than women, and what to do in such emergencies.”

She had hardly uttered this soliloquy, when her *caro sposo* entered, holding an open letter in his hand, and his countenance unusually grave.

“Look here, Sarah,” said he, handing her the epistle, “this is a very disagreeable business. Who’d have thought of her turning out to be such a person?”

Mrs. Buxton only read a line, when she perceived that the letter addressed to her husband was a fac-simile of the one she had received by the same post.

“See, my dear,” observed she, much agitated, “here is a similar one written to me. I’m so shocked. If the statement should prove true, what a hypocrite! what a dreadful person she must be!”

“I can hardly believe it,” replied Mr. Buxton, “for if she was the sort of person here represented,” and he pointed to the letter, “I, who know the world, and who certainly understand your sex,” and he drew himself up self-complacently, “would have detected something in her manner that would have opened my eyes at once. I have been civil to her too, yes, devilish civil,”—and he cast a glance at the large mirror near to which he was standing, and drew up his shirt collars—“and when a fellow is

no worse-looking, if not better-looking, than his neighbours, and is as civil to a pretty girl as I have been to this person, I am convinced, that were she not strictly virtuous, she would have let him see that his civilities were not thrown away."

Mr. Buxton assumed, while speaking, such a libertine air, that, shocked and surprised, his wife burst into a fit of tears, and sunk into a chair.

"What's the matter, Sarah, what do you cry for?"

"Oh! Mr. Bux-ton," sobbed his better half, "I never expected that you would have such wicked thoughts in your head. Oh! dear, oh! dear,"—and she sobbed still more,— "how little I knew your heart! So you have been so very civil as you call it, to Miss Stratford, and I never suspected what bad thoughts were passing in your mind. And you look so different too—quite hardened like. Oh! I can't bear to see you so changed," and the poor woman's tears fell faster.

"Stuff, nonsense, my dear Sarah, you mustn't make a fool of yourself; I assure you I never

gave a thought to Miss Stratford," and the speaker assumed the same air of libertinism that had previously produced so painful an effect on his wife. It was an air that said as plain as an air could speak, "If I *did* happen to wish to win a pretty woman's favour, I should only have to make the attempt in order to succeed."

"And so long as we have been married too," said Mrs. Buxton, still shedding tears, "and I your first and only love, as I have so often heard you say, and now to hear you speak of knowing woman so well, just as if you had been one of those horrid rakes who think of nothing in the world but running after them. Oh! I never expected, Mr. Buxton, that you would make me feel as I now do." R. W.
C. R.

"Why, to hear you talk, Sarah, one would really imagine that I had been playing the deuce. Come, dry up your tears, my dear, you have no manner of cause for them. 'Pon my soul you hav'n't. There, let me kiss you, and no more crying; and let us at once decide what is to be done in this vexatious business."

“I’m determined Miss Stratford shall go,” said Mrs. Buxton, “and what’s more, I’ll never again have a handsome governess.”

“But would it not be cruel, as well as unjust, to send the poor girl away without sifting this tale?”

“Poor girl, indeed! I have no patience with you, Mr. Buxton. I see you want to have her kept here; but it shan’t be. Nothing will induce me to suffer her to remain.”

Mrs. Buxton, the quiet, well-tempered Mrs. Buxton, hitherto so passive and gentle, had now become an angry and unreasonable woman, excited by the pangs of jealousy for the first time awakened in her heart.

“I assure you, my dear, I by no means wish to have Miss Stratford retained; but as the charge against her is brought only by an anonymous letter, we owe it to her, and to ourselves too, not to act in it, until, by a reference to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, the persons named in the letter, we have ascertained the truth. I know something of these solicitors, and will at once write to inquire

whether they drew a deed of settlement from Lord Almondbury to Miss Selina Stratford. If they reply in the affirmative, there can no longer be a doubt, and their answer I shall have the day after to-morrow."

"To please you, Mr. Buxton, I will say or do nothing in this painful business, until the answer comes; but I warn you, that even should it disprove the statement in the letter, I could not bear to have her continue in this house. It may be wrong, it may be foolish, but I can't help it. Suspicious *have* come into my head, all through your rakish looks and manner when you spoke of her; and I feel I never again shall be the same happy woman I was, when I thought you knew nothing, nor cared about any woman but your own wife."

Mr. Buxton thought it rather a good joke to pass in the mind of his wife as a man who *might* please others of her sex, and at first enjoyed her jealousy, which was gratifying to his vanity; but he now began to think he had gone too far with his pleasantry, and, as he marked the flushed cheeks and flashing eyes of his

-

wife, it occurred to him that his comfort might be very much impeded, if not destroyed, by the demon he had evoked in her previously tranquil breast.

"I can't bear to see her after all this," said Mrs. Buxton. "I know I shall be sure to let her perceive by my manner that all is not right, whatever pains I may take to conceal my feelings. I'll not go down stairs to-day, or to-morrow, and that will save me the annoyance of meeting her."

"Do as you please, my dear, about that."

"Oh! then, you wish me to remain in my room, Mr. Buxton, I suppose, that you may have a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Stratford! But I'll disappoint you, that I will. I *won't* stay in my room; not if I were dying would I give you such an opportunity of being alone with that girl."

"'Pon my soul, Sarah, you are making a great fool of yourself. I merely assented to your own proposal of remaining in your room, thinking, as you said, that it would be painful to you to meet that poor girl."

“ Mr. Buxton, Mr. Buxton, you will drive me mad, that’s what you will do, with your poor girl, indeed ; as if I am not the real person to be pitied. Oh ! did I ever think you would give me such pain ? ” And here Mrs. Buxton’s tears streamed afresh.

“ You will make me lose all patience, indeed you will, Sarah, by persevering in such folly. There’s the clock striking two. The luncheon bell will ring in a moment ; wipe your eyes, and go down as usual, and I will write to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor.”

Mrs. Buxton did as she was told, and descended to the dining room, when the calm aspect of Selina almost made her disbelieve the statement contained in the anonymous letter, and even chased every jealous feeling that had, for the last two hours, been torturing her breast.

There is an indescribable something in the countenance and manner of a virtuous woman, which, although often imperceptible to men, who are ever prone to view objects through the distorted medium of their own corrupt notions,

appeals with irresistible force to the breasts of women. Mrs. Buxton felt this influence when she looked at the open brow, and the steady, clear eye of Selina, which met her glance with an expression of frankness and truthfulness that re-established her former confidence.

“How could I have doubted her?” said she to herself; and a blush of shame mounted to her cheeks. And yet, though now convinced of Selina’s innocence, Mrs. Buxton was ill at ease in the presence of her governess. She was dissatisfied with herself for having put faith in an anonymous letter; she was ashamed of the jealousy she had displayed to her husband; and yet she knew her own weakness to be such, that she had not moral courage enough, though firmly believing Selina’s purity, to retain her beneath her roof in defiance of the opinion which the anonymous letter stated was entertained against her by the grandees of the neighbourhood. How well did the wily nurse prove her knowledge of the character of her mistress in the letter, when she inserted the

paragraph relative to the neighbourhood being cognizant of the alleged frailty of Miss Stratford !

Such was the weakness of Mrs. Buxton, and so great was her respect for nobility, that could she have had the most undeniable proofs of the innocence of Selina, joined to the innate conviction which she entertained herself on that point, she would not dare to retain her whom her aristocratic neighbours condemned. How strange are the workings of the human heart ! Mrs. Buxton, though really liking Miss Stratford, wished, yes, in her secret thoughts desired, that the statement in the anonymous letter should be confirmed by the answer of Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, in order that she might be justified for sending Miss Stratford away. Such are the lengths to which weak minds can be carried, when the fear of—not the world's dread laugh—but of the comments of a few country neighbours, for whom no sentiment of esteem or friendship is entertained, can urge a woman, not naturally hard hearted or ill disposed, to such injustice and cruelty.

The answer from Messrs. Culpepper and

Scrutor arrived, and the writer, after denying the right of any gentleman to inquire into the transactions between their house and any of their clients, stated, that respect for the high character of Mr. Buxton, of whom they knew nothing but that he had lately inherited a great fortune, and had once called at their office, about purchasing the right of a small manor adjoining his own large one, induced the writer to swerve for once from the usual system of secrecy of the house of Culpepper and Scrutor, and to admit that a deed of settlement had been drawn up in their office, by the instructions of the Right Honorable Lord Almondbury, granting, for her natural life, an annuity of one hundred guineas a year to Miss Selina Stratford. It was added that, in making this unusual disclosure, reliance was placed in the honour and discretion of Mr. Buxton, not to reveal what had been confided to him.

“Yes, she must go,” said Mrs. Buxton, as soon as she had perused the letter handed to her by her husband.

“But what if this annuity were granted to

her for no lapse of virtue, but as an honourable reward for good conduct?" observed Mr. Buxton.

"If she were an elderly woman, who had brought up his children from infancy, and so was pensioned off, there might be a chance of the matter being as you say, my dear; but think of her youth, and his lordship's character as a libertine, as the letter stated, and you must admit that Miss Stratford could not have got an annuity for having brought up a family, she being herself but a very young woman."

"Still I cannot believe her guilty; I cannot, indeed, my dear Sarah."

"But, innocent or guilty, she must go. We could not think of keeping her with us, in defiance of the opinion of all the nobility in the neighbourhood. Already have they marked their sense of her conduct by never including her in any of their invitations to us. If this does not show their opinion, I know not what could."

"But, if it so happened that these great lords and ladies *don't* invite governesses in

general, and therefore meant no slight to Miss Stratford in particular? and this may, after all, be the case; and you and I, my dear Sarah, not being acquainted with the etiquette in such matters, may have taken as an affront to her, that which is but a general custom.”

“ Why, you, Mr. Buxton, saw the statement in the letters as well as I did; and as the part about the annuity has been proved true, depend upon it all the rest is.”

“ I wish I knew any one that I could inquire of, as to whether it's the custom to invite governesses when their employers are asked out?”

“ Pray, my dear, make no such inquiry. It would only get us laughed at among the whole of this proud set in our neighbourhood, for showing our ignorance.”

“ All I can say, Sarah, is, that if you felt as I do, convinced of this poor girl's innocence, in spite of the malicious anonymous letter, and the admission on the part of the solicitors, hang me if I would not let her remain here, without caring a fig for what all the grandees in the

neighbourhood might think, or say, about the matter."

"I am surprised, Mr. Buxton, to see you get so very warm on this subject; and more than that, Mr. Buxton, I see plainly you have set your heart on keeping this girl here, and I will not consent to have any one under the same roof with me whose character is the topic of all the noble families around us."

"Well, let her go. Anything for a quiet life; but I really thought you had more heart in you, Sarah, ay, and more moral courage too, than to throw over a poor girl, whose innocence you say you believe, out of dread of what lords and ladies may say."

"And I thought, Mr. Buxton, that you had less heart to spare, than to be ready to turn a Don Quixote for a person who you now know, beyond a doubt, has received an annuity from one of the greatest libertines in England!" and Mrs. Buxton's cheeks grew red, and tears of anger started to her eyes, as she finished the sentence.

"Send her away, send her away, in God's

name, Sarah! and let me never hear the poor girl's name again."

"Ay, there you go again. Poor girl, indeed! I know not why you should call her poor girl! But how had I best tell her that I have no longer occasion for her services?"

"Ah! I see you are ashamed of yourself! But—but—spare me the angry remonstrance I see hovering on your lips. If you feel reluctant to communicate personally with her, write a note, and say that we shall be compelled to leave home for an indefinite time, therefore must part from her, and that she is at liberty to go as soon as she pleases. You ought, in common decency, to make her a handsome present, for you must allow, Sarah, that she has been of the greatest possible service to us here."

"So she has, my dear, and I will gladly make her whatever present you think I ought; but I really can't write a falsehood. If I say we are going from home, we must positively go somewhere for a little while; for I could not reconcile it to my conscience to write a story."

“Well, I’ve no objection to go any where you like. And I’ll give you fifty pounds, over and above her salary, to make a present to Miss Stratford.”

The note was written and despatched to Selina, whose astonishment at its contents may easily be imagined. The style of the note, too, though meant to be civil, if not kind, was so constrained, so formal, that, as she perused the letter, she felt that there was more than met the eye in it; that the sentiments in her favour, so often avowed by Mrs. Buxton, must have undergone a total revolution, before it could have been written. In what could this change have originated? was the next thought that presented itself to her mind. But vain was the search to discover a cause for a conduct so unexpected, so at variance with all the previous kind treatment experienced at the hands of Mrs. Buxton. She was more than half tempted to request an interview with that lady, and to intreat an explanation; but her pride and conscious innocence revolted at taking a step that might lead Mrs. Buxton to imagine that she

wished to change the resolution taken to give her her *congé*. She therefore contented herself by writing a letter, stating that she would be ready to depart the next morning; and adding, that she must request a few lines from Mrs. Buxton, to certify that since her entrance into the family she had given no cause for dissatisfaction. The abruptness of the notice to give up her situation must, she further added, plead her excuse for this request, as she wished her friends to be satisfied that no fault on her part had occasioned her sudden dismissal. Poor Selina sighed as she wrote the *s* to friend; for she remembered that she had only one on earth, on the continuance of whose regard she could count. A few hours before, she believed that she might reckon on the lasting friendship of Mrs. Buxton, and on finding a peaceful, if not a happy, home beneath her roof, for many years to come. But how short a time had it taken to destroy these illusions, and to teach her that, henceforth, she must put less faith in professions of friendship. To accept the liberal gift offered by her employer, unac-

accompanied by any of the kindness or cordial assurances of undiminished regard and esteem that would have given value to it, she felt would be impossible, so she enclosed the cheque in her letter to Mrs. Buxton, politely but firmly declining it.

“ See,” said that lady to her husband, after reading the letter, “ here are two corroborative proofs that the charge against Miss Stratford is true. In the first place, she asks no explanation, which she decidedly would, if she felt conscious that she could justify herself from every accusation; and, in the second, if she did not possess an independence through the annuity, she would not have resigned so liberal a gift as fifty pounds, which, to a person relying solely on her salary for maintenance, is a little fortune.”

Such were the charitable conclusions of Mrs. Buxton, to which her husband, whether convinced of their justice, or fearful of making any defence in favour of the accused, which might again awaken the jealousy of his wife, made no reply, except to express his regret that the proffered gift had not been accepted.

“ The fault is not ours, Mr. Buxton ; had it been wanted it would have been kept,” observed his wife. “ I think,” resumed she, after a little reflection, “ that I may, without wounding my conscience, comply with her request, for certainly, since she has been here, I have seen nothing to find fault with. As far as my own personal experience goes, I might speak highly of her, and, unless required to explain why I parted with her, I don’t think myself compelled to denounce her.”

A letter, consistent with this mental reservation, was written, and given to Selina, when, after much consultation, and considerable reluctance, Mrs. Buxton was prevailed on by her husband to meet her at dinner. Again the appearance and manner of Miss Stratford produced their former influence in her favour, on the weak-minded Mrs. Buxton, who felt an embarrassment in the presence of the poor and unfriended girl she was expelling from her house without affording her a chance of justifying herself. But Mrs. Buxton, conscious of her own weakness, felt aware that, even

could the most convincing proofs of Selina's innocence be given her, she had not moral courage sufficient to uphold her against the opinions of her noble neighbours. The evening passed slowly and painfully to all three. At parting, Mrs. Buxton tried again to press on Selina the gift proffered in the morning, but it was steadily rejected; and when Selina wished them farewell, both husband and wife felt a sense of shame and embarrassment from which a consciousness of her own freedom, from a single act or thought that could have merited the change in their conduct towards her, kept the poor and dependant girl exempt. She had written to her friend, Mr. Vernon, to say that she would become his guest the next evening, reserving, until their meeting, the fact that she was leaving for ever the home she had so lately thought would be her permanent one for years to come. The whole conduct of Mr. and Mrs. Buxton was so inexplicable to her, that she could not attempt to explain it; but she well knew that the confidence in her, entertained by her excellent and tried friend, could not be

shaken by the caprice and injustice of others, so no doubt of a warm and affectionate welcome occurred to add to her chagrin at her abrupt dismissal.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE meeting between Selina and her old and kind friend, was very trying to the feelings of both; and yet the conviction of the perfect sympathy in their grief, was soothing and consolatory to each. The worthy man found relief in dwelling on the many excellent qualities of his departed wife, to one whom he knew had always duly appreciated them; and Selina was gratified by hearing that, to the last, Mrs. Vernon had retained an almost maternal affection for her. How did the vacant chair, the little work-table and footstool, so many years used by *her* whom they should never more see on earth, affect Selina! She found the bereaved husband terribly shaken by the blow that had destroyed his domestic happiness. His health, previously so good, was now

much impaired, and his spirits had received a shock not to be overcome at his advanced age.

People are apt to imagine, that such afflictions as that under which Mr. Vernon was now suffering, are most heavily felt ere age has blunted the feelings, and when the vigour of youth adds poignancy to them. Perhaps grief may then be most vehement, just as fevers are more active with the youthful than with the aged; but if sorrow be less violent with the old than with the young, is its duration not much longer, and its influence more baneful? Habit, which forges the strongest chains, has rivetted those that bind an affectionate old couple together during a union of many years, so closely, that when the link is broken by death, life becomes insupportable to the survivor. With the lost partner of his joys and sorrows, his good and evil fortune, departs all the pleasant memories of his youth and manhood, and he enters the dark evening of life, uncheered by the companion who had shared its sunshine. The position of his young friend was the sole thought, on this side of the grave,

that drew Mr. Vernon from the grief that was undermining his health, and rapidly conducting him to the tomb that had so lately closed over the mortal remains of his departed wife. When told of the unexpected and abrupt manner in which Selina had been dismissed, and informed of the extreme kindness she had experienced, up to the last three days of her abode with Mr. and Mrs. Buxton, he felt convinced that there must exist some unexplained cause to account for such conduct. The testimonial in Selina's favour, written by Mrs. Buxton, did not satisfy him. There lurked, he was persuaded, some mystery, which, in justice to Selina, ought to be laid bare, and he determined that, as far as it lay in his power, it should be solved. He wrote to the friend who had applied to him when Selina was engaged, and demanded, as an act of justice, that Mr. Buxton should explain to this their mutual acquaintance, the cause of Miss Stratford's sudden dismissal. The tone in which this request was made, drew from Mr. Buxton a statement of the whole affair. One of the anonymous

letters written to him was forwarded for inspection; and great was the shock and disgust Selina's friend experienced when he perused it. He instantly appealed to Lord Almondbury, whose return from the continent he had noticed announced in a newspaper a few days before, related the whole affair to him, and entreated his lordship to justify Miss Stratford.

Lord Almondbury, indignant at the calumny, immediately wrote to Mr. Buxton, stating that, at the dying request of his departed wife, he had instructed his lawyers to draw up a deed of settlement, of one hundred pounds per annum, to Miss Stratford, for her life, as a testimonial of the high opinion, and warm esteem, entertained for that young lady by the deceased countess, who had also marked her regard by other gifts. That, to his sincere regret, the settlement had been rejected, as had also been the repeated offer made to Miss Stratford to continue the governess of his daughter; and his lordship added, that so great was the respect he felt for the principles and conduct of the

young lady, that he knew no one under whose care and tuition he would so readily place his child. But Lord Almondbury was determined the affair should not rest there; for he went to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, severely reprehended them for their indiscretion, dismissed them from the management of his affairs, and proved, by destroying the deed of settlement in their presence, that it had never been accepted, though he took especial care to explain that it was by the desire of his departed countess it had been drawn up.

Great was the surprise and confusion of Mr. and Mrs. Buxton when Lord Almondbury's letter reached them. "Well, my dear, you will remember that I never believed Miss Stratford guilty," observed Mrs. Buxton.

"And I am quite sure *I* did not," replied her husband. "If my advice had been followed," added he, "the poor girl never should have left the house."

"But with our noble neighbours," said Mrs. Buxton, "what could we have done?"

"Not cared a fig about them. They'll go

anywhere where they get good dinners and wine, like mine."

"Nevertheless, my dear, it would have been very disagreeable to have exposed ourselves to observations, perhaps to slights, on account of a person who was no relation."

"I'll tell you, Sarah, for the twentieth time though it may be, that we are too rich to meet with slights from our neighbours, and as for their observations, who will have the impudence to repeat them to us; so what shall we be the worse for their spite?"

"Ah! so you always say; but I have not your nerves, my dear."

The anxiety to vindicate Miss Stratford, had, for a brief period, withdrawn her kind friend, Mr. Vernon, from the all-engrossing grief that was evidently hurrying him to the grave. But when he saw her fair fame re-established, his thoughts relapsed into their previous sadness, and not even the presence of Selina, much and affectionately as he regarded her, could cheer his drooping spirits. When, however, she proposed again to seek a situation, he so strongly

objected to the measure, and declared that her society being now his only consolation, it would be unkind, nay more, cruel of her to leave him to die alone, as he said, that Selina consented to prolong her stay, using every effort in her power to render her sojourn beneath his roof a source of comfort to her benefactor. She read aloud to him, consulted his feeble appetite in the choice of his food, wrote his letters, and was ever near to induce him to enter into conversation, instead of indulging the mournful reminiscences, or moody reveries, into which he was prone to drop. Warmly and deeply did he feel this unceasing care and attention; and often did he regret that fortune had denied him the power to reward it.

With great difficulty Selina got him to consent to see a physician; but the one called in took an opportunity of informing her that his aid was useless, as nothing could retard the progress of the disease, a total breaking up of the constitution, that must soon consign her only friend to the grave. The friends and neighbours of Mr. Vernon were constant in

their visits to him. To the most valued of them he recommended his adopted daughter, as he loved to call her, entreating them to assist her in finding a situation, he, alas! not having the means to enable her to subsist without one.

And now every day marked how rapidly the sick man was sinking; and as the conviction was forced on her who watched over him with filial tenderness, she felt her gratitude and affection increase, and add poignancy to her regret. It was a touching sight to see that young creature bending over the couch of the dying man, watching, with tearful eyes, his already death-like face, and trying to catch his weak and trembling accents. Every hour seemed to threaten to be the last of his mortal career. He no longer recognized those around him, or was conscious when spoken to. Such was the state of affairs when a woman, of most unprepossessing appearance, and vulgar manners, arrived at his house. She was about sixty years of age, corpulent, and unwieldy in person, yet with an activity of mind, and energy of purpose, not often met with. "I am just

arrived to see my poor dear cousin," said this person, forcing her way to the bed of the dying man, and applying a handkerchief to her eyes. "Ah!" resumed she, "I see it will all soon be over with him in this world. I must have Mr. Praywell to come to him, and see if he cannot save his poor sinful soul."

Selina looked at this strange intruder with mingled surprise and alarm, and her expressive countenance probably revealed her feelings; for the stranger, throwing herself into the easy chair by the bedside, provided for the accommodation of Selina, stared steadily at her, and, with the air of being perfectly at home, coolly said, "Pray, who are you? I know my cousin, poor man, never had a child. His wife, who was no better than she should be, and turned him against his relations, had none of her own that ever I could hear of; indeed, she was a woman of no family, and he greatly demeaned himself by marrying. I am therefore at a loss to know what claims *you*, not being a relative, have to be established here as mistress of the house, and head nurse, as

one may say? You'll excuse my freedom; but it has a mighty strange appearance to see a young, yes, and a pretty looking girl too, living with a man in this sort of way. I, being the next relation to the poor old man lying there, his first cousin, and heir-at-law to whatever he leaves behind him, have a right to know why you, who are nothing to him, are here, as if you were mistress of the house?"

"I am here by Mr. Vernon's own desire, Madam. His late wife, as well as himself, extended their protection and kindness to me, and for many years have treated me as their adopted child!" and the recollection of the affection of the excellent couple brought tears into the eyes of Selina.

"Adopted child, indeed!" reiterated the rude stranger. "It's a nice thing for people to be taking to other men's children, when they have kindred of their own. What would Mr. Praywell say to such doings, I should like to know? So here you have been living in clover, on the fat of the land, as one may say," and the speaker glanced around inquiringly at the

comfortable chamber ; “ and all at the expense of a man who is nothing on earth to you, while I, who am his first cousin, have been in want of many, if not all, the comforts I was accustomed to. I declare it’s a burning shame, so it is ; and the state he is in,” and she pointed to the poor speechless, sightless man, “ seems quite a judgment on him !”

“ Madam, I must request you not to mention his name with disrespect. He was the best, the kindest of men !” and here Selina’s words were broken by sobs.

“ And I’ll take leave, Miss, to tell you, that as I am his relation, and you are nothing to him, I am not to be dictated to. I dare say he might be the kindest of men to *you* ; old fools in their dotage generally are, when they fall into the hands of artful and designing young women. But he never showed any kindness to *me*, except two or three times sending me a trifle of money when I wrote to him I was in distress, so I need not be expected to act the hypocrite, and cry my eyes out, like some folk. Now, it’s my opinion, Miss, that if you have

any decency left, the best thing you can do is to take yourself off, and leave the dying man to be looked after by his own relation, who is the natural person to close his eyes."

"You must permit me, Madam, to be the best judge of my own conduct," said Selina, with grave dignity; and, while Mr. Vernon lives, I will not leave him."

"We'll soon see that when Mr. Praywell comes. Yes, you'll find out who has a real right to be mistress here."

The female servant, who had entered a few minutes before, having heard the threats of the audacious intruder, whispered Miss Stratford not to mind her, and that she would step off to Mr. Steadfast, and bring him to protect her.

"I'll have no whisperings or underhand doings here," said the stranger. "My cousin, it is quite clear, has only a few hours to live, and I am the proper and natural person to take charge of him and his property. I'll have Mr. Praywell to come and attend to his spiritual wants. *He* will arouse the sleeping conscience of the dying sinner, and make him repent his

unnatural conduct to his relations, of whom I am the last."

The dying man moaned, and Selina flew to his pillow. The stranger followed her example, as fast as her obesity would permit; and, while Selina bent down to catch his accents, in case he should speak, she, with the voice of a stentor, shouted in his ear, "Cousin, you are dying. Think of your sinful soul, and repent your guilt ere it be too late. It is *I*, Sarah Muckridge, your own first cousin, the only relation you have in the world, who is now speaking to you."

"In pity," said Selina, her voice tremulous from emotion, "do not disturb his last hours."

"What, would you have him die without repentance? rush into the presence of his Maker without having asked *His* pardon? aye, and my pardon too, for his manifold sins; not the least of which was, his neglect of me, and his keeping you here, setting an example of sinfulness, disgraceful to a man of his age."

Again the dying man uttered a faint moan. "He hears me, he hears me," exclaimed Mrs.

Muckridge, "You repent your shameful doings, don't you, cousin, and renounce Satan and this young woman, the sharer of your sin?"

Selina shuddered, and became pale as marble; for now for the first time did she comprehend the gross meaning of the speeches of the dreadful woman before her.

"Cousin, I say," resumed Mrs. Muckridge, "your last hour is come. Implore the forgiveness of your offended God, and of man, for the evil example you have given,"

These words were spoken in so loud a tone of voice, as to be heard by Mr. Steadfast, who had just entered the hall beneath, and who hastily ascended to the chamber of his friend to interpose between him and the harsh termagant who was disturbing his last moments. As he entered, Mr. Vernon opened his eyes, fixed them with an expression of unutterable fondness on Selina, who was kneeling by his bedside, then glanced with evident dislike at Mrs. Muckridge, and cast a look of earnest appeal to Mr. Steadfast.

"Sinful man, sinful man!" exclaimed the

hardened woman. "See how even at his last hour he looked at the partner of his guilt, with a fondness which proves that his stubborn heart is a stranger to repentance."

The dying man's eye rebuked this speech, and for a moment it was lighted up with intelligence. He endeavoured to speak, but the effort was unavailing, and in a few minutes a loud sigh proclaimed that all was over.

"Go to the Golden Lion round the corner of the street," said Mrs. Muckridge to the female servant, who stood weeping by the bed, "and tell Mr. Praywell to come here immediately."

The servant took no notice of the order, though uttered in a most authoritative tone. "Go, I say," repeated Mrs. Muckridge.

"Pray, Madam, by what right have you intruded here, and disturbed the dying moments of one of the most excellent, the most respected of men?" inquired Mr. Steadfast.

"Before I answer your impertinent question, I must ascertain by what authority you presume to ask it?" replied Mrs. Muckridge, her face red with anger.

“As the executor of my departed friend, and for the present his representative here.”

“Oh! if you are his executor that alters the case, and I shall not object to inform you who I am.—My name is Muckridge; I am first cousin and sole relative to the deceased, and as such came here to take care of him, and endeavour in his last hours to make him sensible of his wickedness.”

“You must, whatever your degree of relationship to my departed friend may be, know little of his life and character, when you presume to accuse him of wickedness.”

“What do you call his having this young woman here?” and she pointed with a contemptuous gesture to Selina: “what right had she to live with him, I should like to know, unless the right of sin?”

“Hold your impious tongue, woman, and shame not the virtuous young creature, who was to him as a daughter, by such foul, such calumnious insinuations.”

“I scorn to use insinuations, and assert at once, that as no tie of relationship existed

between him and that weeping Magdalen there," pointing at Selina, "she had no right to be here, and would not have taken such an outrageous step, if she had the slightest regard for her character."

"And I assert, that you are a shameless slanderer of the dead and of the living," said Mr. Steadfast; "and I command you at once to leave this house, and not compel me to have the police to expel you."

"Ho! ho! I see how it is. You are the worthy friend and companion of the sinful old fool, who is gone to answer for his wicked doings, and you, I suppose, intend to share the plunder with that virtuous young creature there," and the speaker laid a strong emphasis on the word "virtuous."

Mr. Steadfast left the room, hurried down stairs, and the hall-door was heard to open and close.

"Here, young woman, here's half-a-crown for you, if you will run to the Golden Lion, and tell Mr. Praywell to come here directly."

"I'll do no such thing," replied the servant, indignantly.

Mrs. Muckridge walked to the table, on which was the gold watch of the deceased, with a silver goblet, and turning her back to the bed, close to which knelt the weeping Selina, and stood the servant, she seized the watch and the goblet, concealed both beneath her cloak, and attempted to leave the room,—but the servant had watched her proceedings; and, placing herself before the door, declared that Mrs. Muckridge should not depart until she had replaced the watch and goblet again on the table. At this moment, a knock at the hall-door announced the return of Mr. Steadfast. Sally, the faithful servant, hurried down to open it, admitted Mr. Steadfast and two of the police who accompanied him, and informed them of the attempt to steal the watch and goblet. They, however, found both those articles on the table, where dread of the police had induced Mrs. Muckridge to replace them; and the police informed her that unless she at once consented to leave the house quietly, they would not only expulse her by force, but arrest her on a charge of

robbery. She endeavoured to make them believe that she was falsely accused, and invented an artful tale, which might, perhaps, have imposed on the police, had they not been so well acquainted with the excellent character, not only of the deceased, but of Mr. Steadfast.

“If no will is found, and I am convinced no *true one* will be forthcoming,” said Mrs. Muckridge, “I shall be the rightful heir to all my cousin left behind him.”

“You shall be informed when the will is to be opened,” replied Mr. Steadfast; “until then, you shall not again enter this house.”

Mrs. Steadfast no sooner heard of the death of her worthy neighbour, than she hastened to his house to invite Miss Stratford to her own. All that kindness and sympathy could offer was showered on Selina by the excellent couple, who knew how strong was the attachment entertained for her by the departed and his wife; and how well it was merited. Both now remembered having many years before heard Mr. Vernon mention his having but one relation alive, and that being a very ill-conducted

woman, whose frequent demands for money, and violent abuse when it was withheld, had given him great annoyance. This person had not been heard of for some time, and was supposed to have gone to America with an itinerant preacher, whose morals wholly unfitted him for any clerical calling.

Selina refused to leave the house, while it contained the remains of her kind friend, and in order to afford her protection, Mrs. Steadfast came to sleep there. Selina felt as if again left an orphan in a world where she had no friend; and as she looked on the face of the dead, and recalled to memory the kind smile with which it had been wont to welcome her, tears of regret for his loss, mingled with gratitude for his goodness to her, chased each other down her cheeks.

The will, which had been placed by the deceased in the hands of his lawyer, was now to be opened for instructions for his interment. Mrs. Muckridge was apprised of this, and invited to be present at the reading. The whole of the furniture and plate, and a couple of hundred pounds, the fruits of his and his worthy wife's

economy, were bequeathed to Selina, and a bequest of twenty pounds to the faithful servant. Mr. Steadfast undertook to dispose of the furniture, which brought a couple of hundred pounds more, so that, when all the funeral expenses were paid, Selina found herself in possession of three hundred and fifty pounds, with some plain and simple articles of plate, endeared to her by association with the departed friends who bequeathed them, and which she determined nothing short of actual want should ever induce her to part from.

CHAPTER XV.

THE last sad duties to the dead now over, Selina accepted the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Steadfast to pass some time with them. It cost her many a pang to leave the house where she had received such constant kindness and affection, and as she gave a last look on the little parlour, where some of the most cheerful hours of her life had been passed, she invoked a blessing on the memory of her departed friends.

When a few days were gone by, and that her nerves had recovered from the shock occasioned by the late event, she named to Mrs. Steadfast her desire to find occupation.

“I fear that I can be of little use in procuring you a situation as governess,” said that worthy woman; “I have no acquaintances among the class in which a well-educated per-

son like you ought to enter. No one thinks of referring to the wife of a simple tradesman like myself, for a governess, though I am often asked to recommend a lady's maid or housekeeper. Indeed, no later than yesterday I was applied to for an attendant, to serve a very rich lady."

The thought struck Selina to offer herself for this place. The trials and the discomforts that await governesses, and which she had experienced, had so firmly convinced her that no situation could offer less chance of peace, that she was willing to try whether as *femme de chambre* she might not avoid many of the annoyances that had assailed her in her former position. She expressed her sentiments on this point to Mrs. Steadfast, who rather encouraged than checked the notion, having had occasion to know more than one instance where ladies' maids enjoyed many advantages and comforts seldom extended to governesses.

"If permitted to take my repasts in my own room, or only with a housekeeper," observed Selina, "I should have no other objection to enter

service. To fit myself for it I must take lessons in dress-making, hair-dressing, and getting up laces. I shall soon acquire these essentials to my new calling, for I am quick in learning."

"But with your various accomplishments, my dear Miss Stratford, and your appearance, your manner too, it really grieves me that you should descend in life."

"It depends on oneself, dear Mrs. Steadfast, by the faithful fulfilment of one's duties, to render every situation respectable."

"You are right, I believe. You are wiser than most of your age, and I hope and trust, whatever step you decide on taking, will bring you happiness."

"You will oblige me by writing to the friend who inquired if you knew a lady's maid you could recommend, and in a fortnight, by diligent application, I trust I may be prepared for my new duties."

Mrs. Steadfast did as she was requested, and the next day brought the housekeeper in person to answer the letter. She saw Selina, professed herself charmed with her appearance

and manner, declared *sotto voce* to Mrs. Steadfast that Miss Stratford was much more fit to fill the place of a lady than a lady's maid; and said she was sure that Mrs. Fraser, the lady with whom she was to live, would be greatly pleased with her. Mrs. Goodson, (so was the portly housekeeper named,) never accorded the title of mistress to any of the ladies she served, and to the one in whose establishment she now was, she would least of all think of doing so; but, with this pretension and weakness of not recognizing as masters and mistresses those whose wages she received, and whose bread she ate, she was in the main an honest and respectable woman.

“Mrs. Fraser,” observed she, “is quite a young and inexperienced per-”—son, she would have said, but she corrected the *lapsus linguæ*, before more than half the word was uttered, and substituted “lady,” in its place. “She is extremely well-tempered, and gentle, and her attendant will have little trouble, and may be very happy with her. With Mr. Fraser it is somewhat different—he is old, does not enjoy

good health, is rather of a morose disposition, and it is clear has not been used to young people. He has made an immense fortune in India, where he filled some very high legal post, returned home with ruined health, and committed the folly, for a folly it must surely be considered, to marry a young creature of whom he might be the grandfather. But this is not the worst part of it. Poor Mrs. Fraser, for poor she is, notwithstanding all the gold he lavishes on her, has a mother and sisters in very bad circumstances. She believed, when she married a gentleman of such a disproportionate age, that she might offer a home to her mother and two sisters, on whom she dotes, or, at all events, that he would enable her to provide comfortably for them, and allow her to see them constantly. I believe he led her to think all this, poor young creature, and it was a great shame for him so to impose on her; but when they returned after the honeymoon, he soon let her see the cloven foot. He has given no provision,—so I hear from the valet,—to the mother and her two daughters,

who have not enough to enable them, even by pinching themselves of all solid comforts, to keep up an appearance of decency. They are very good persons, and have seen better days, for the father of Mrs. Fraser was a colonel in the army, and a gentleman of good family, and the mother was the daughter of a Dean Everfield, who would have been a bishop if he had lived. So, you see, they are every way respectable.”

Such was the extent of the housekeeper’s information, who, being of a very communicative disposition, seldom neglected any opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of the affairs of her employers, and still more seldom missed any occasion of making them known to others.

We must now make our readers acquainted with the remainder of the history of Mrs. Fraser. Her father’s regiment had been sent to India, but he, dreading the effect of the climate for his wife and young children, or, probably, not having the means to defray the heavy expense consequent on such a voyage, left them in England. In India he formed the

acquaintance of Mr. Fraser, to whom he often spoke of his wife and children at home. After some years, and just as the poor colonel's regiment was to return to England, and he all joy at the prospect of being restored to his wife and children, he died suddenly, leaving little beside the small pension to which an officer's widow is entitled. When, some three or four years after, Mr. Fraser came home from India, he sought out the widow of his friend. He found that all his own relations had died, except some remote ones in Scotland, who were poor, and could do him no credit. Friends and acquaintances he had none, save those he had made in India, and who, like himself, had returned to enjoy in England the wealth accumulated there. He became attracted by the beauty of Mrs. Herbert's eldest daughter, and held out hopes that if this poor young creature would bestow her hand on him, he would not only place her in affluence, but provide handsomely for her mother and sisters. This last hope was the inducement that conquered the natural dislike of the poor girl to wed a man

old enough to be her grandfather, and of plain appearance and disagreeable manners. Fondly attached to her mother and sisters, and well aware, for she had shared them, of the privations they had to undergo, she determined to secure their comfort by the sacrifice of her own happiness, and wedded Mr. Fraser. Mrs. Herbert's poverty, and consequent seclusion, had broken off nearly all intercourse with former friends and acquaintances, so she had no one to consult on the marriage of her daughter, or to see that a proper settlement was made on her. To stipulate on any allowance to herself, though she was led to believe that she was to receive one, would, in her mind, be like bartering her child for gold; so she never hinted at it, although the prospect of seeing her two younger daughters placed in comfort was a great inducement to her to consent to her beautiful Amy's wedding a disagreeable old man. The nuptials were celebrated; the blooming bride, and yellow, withered bridegroom set off on a tour, without his making even the customary gifts to the two youthful bridesmaids, the

Misses Herbert, or offering any assistance to their poor mother. The bride thought that, at the parting moment, a bank note of a large amount would be slipped into the hand of her weeping mother, and this conviction cheered her when depressed by contemplating the yellow, wrinkled face reflected in the front glass of the chariot, every glance at which made her shudder.

The temper of Mr. Fraser, never good, was considerably ruffled on this occasion by having heard an Irish apple-woman, whose stall was near Mrs. Herbert's humble abode at Brompton, exclaim, as he handed his bride into the carriage, "Ah! there goes a beautiful rosebud tied to a faded old orange-lily, and more's the pity."

Mrs. Herbert grew pale when she remembered how large a portion of the sum meant to support her and her two daughters for the next half year, had been spent in providing a few indispensable articles of clothing for the bride. Mr. Fraser had sent no *trousseau*, no *corbeille*, well as he knew the inability of Mrs.

Herbert to provide either, and she was too delicate to hint a word on the subject. She had, therefore, bought some linen, and a few dresses, more suitable to the position her daughter was henceforth to fill than in accordance with her own very limited means; and now she found herself much worse off than ever, and trembled as she looked on her weeping girls, who could not, for some hours, be consoled when they saw the vacant place of that dear and gentle sister, who had never before quitted them. The alarmed mother recalled to mind how, when she had ventured to recommend a maid for her daughter, Mr. Fraser desired her not to trouble herself, for he had provided one, who would meet his wife at the place they were to stop at for the night the day they should leave Town. She thought, at the moment, that the arrangement was a strange and ungracious one; but it had occurred to her that, probably, Mr. Fraser might not wish the servant of his wife to see the humble abode whence he took her, and that, until she and her daughters were placed by him in one more consonant to the

position her married daughter was to hold, he wished to avoid any persons of his establishment coming to the little cottage at Brompton. But when day after day passed without bringing her a line from her child, that child of whose attachment she could not, for a moment, entertain a doubt, and of whose whereabouts she would have remained in total ignorance, had not the "Morning Post" announced the fact that the *millionaire* Mr. Fraser and his lovely bride were arrived at Cheltenham—that conservatory for returned Indians with diseased livers. She instantly wrote a letter to Mrs. Fraser, and waited, in an agony of suspense, for an answer. But she waited in vain; and then she bethought herself of writing to Mr. Fraser. But even the pain of suspense was less bitter to be borne than the fearful truth that broke on her mind when his answer arrived. The following lines were the whole contents of the letter:—

"Madam,—Mrs. Fraser did not receive your favour, for at her age I think it incumbent on

me to open and read all letters addressed to her, consequently yours came to my hands; and I will be plain with you,—I have deemed it expedient that she should not see it. When I married your daughter, and relieved you from the expense of her board, lodging, and clothing, which, in your confined circumstances, must be a great saving, I never contemplated encumbering myself with you, or your two daughters. The position which my wife will fill is so widely different to yours, that an intercourse between you could only bring painful comparisons to the minds of both parties. This is to be avoided, more especially as Mrs. Fraser's undue sensibility, foolishly, I must say, allowed by you to become morbid, would, if encouraged, either by personal intercourse or correspondence, be likely to impair her health, or, at all events, interfere with my comfort.

“ I remain, Madam, your obedient Servant,

“ JAMES FRASER.”

The grief of the mother and sisters at finding themselves denied the happiness of seeing her

so dear to them, may easily be imagined. The separation tortured them, and well did they know the effect it would produce on the unfortunate young creature, who had, they felt convinced, formed this ill-assorted union, more with a view to the advantages *they* might derive from it, than from any ambitious wishes of her own. *They* could talk of the dear absent one, could dwell on her perfections, and they were manifold, and there was some faint consolation even in this. But she—she had no one to whom she could speak of that loved, though humble, home; of that dear and affectionate mother, and those beloved sisters, whom it was agony to leave, even when cheered by the delusive hope of beholding them again in a few weeks. What a solitude of the heart must her's be, with a harsh and stern old man, as they now, too late, discovered Mr. Fraser to be; and their own grief was absorbed in pity and sympathy for her's.

Such was the state of affairs in the mansion in which Selina Stratford was to make her *début* in the humble position of *Femme de*

Chambre. To serve so gentle and unfortunate a being as Mrs. Fraser was represented to be, was more consonant with her wishes than an entrance into the family of a lady of fashion; and when, the following day, she presented herself in Grosvenor-square, and was admitted to the presence of the youthful wife, her touching beauty, the pensive expression of her countenance, and the low, sweet sound of her voice, excited the liveliest interest in the breast of Selina. Mr. Fraser was present at the interview, and his appearance fully justified the prejudice Selina had imbibed against him. He examined her attentively, demanded her age, family, and where she had previously served. When told she had never been a *femme de chambre* before, he expressed his satisfaction, saying that he peculiarly wished to have a person who had not held the situation in any other family, although he expected her to be able to fulfil the functions. "Mrs. Fraser is so very young and inexperienced," added the stern old man, "that you will refer to me before you obey any of her orders that are at all out of

the ordinary routine, by which I mean, you are never to deliver or receive letters or notes, to or from her. You are never to admit visitors to her dressing-room, however nearly related to her they may be, or to convey messages."

Selina stole a glance at the fair young creature before her, whose face, one moment covered with blushes, was the next as pale as marble. Tears trembled in her downcast eyes, and the movement of the white drapery that covered her delicate bust revealed the agitation of the heart that throbbed beneath it.

Mr. Fraser was a singularly plain man. Age had left its searing marks on a low and retreating forehead, crossed by deep lines, eyes dim, and bordered by lids of a crimson hue, which rendered the dingy yellow tint of the whole face still more striking by the contrast, reminding one of a yellow tulip, with a few streaks of red on it. A black wig, of so juvenile a fashion as to represent the hair of a dandy of twenty, increased the disagreeable effect produced by the whole countenance; and the extreme foppishness of his dress attracted more attention to

the gaunt and ill-formed figure, whose defects it by no means concealed. False whiskers, attached to the wig, and adhering to the yellow cheeks through the medium of gum, and teeth, "few and far between," revealed whenever their owner spoke, completed as revolting a face as ever Selina looked upon. To glance from this disagreeable object to the fair creature who bore his name, ay, and had to bear with it the frequent ebullitions of a temper never good, but now soured by age, ill health, and evil passions, was quite sufficient to make her feel disgust for one, and deep pity for the other.

Mrs. Fraser was remarkably beautiful. Faultless in features, and with a fairness of complexion seldom seen, hair dark as the raven's wing, and eyes of a deep blue, with a charming mouth and teeth, it was impossible to see a more lovely creature. Her figure was tall and slender, yet not deficient in that roundness of *contour* which gives feminine beauty its finishing touch, and her feet and hands were of extreme delicacy.

"And what situation have you hitherto

held?" demanded Mr. Fraser, with the air of an inquisitor.

"That of a nursery governess," replied Selina, wishing to conceal that she was capable of being a governess to young people more advanced in years, lest the discovery might militate against her being engaged in so subordinate a one as that for which she now offered herself.

"A nursery governess," repeated he, "so much the better, for you can serve as a sort of companion to Mrs. Fraser, as well as lady's maid, and this will be agreeable to me when I am forced to absent myself from home, as I have a peculiar objection to her being left alone."

Again Mrs. Fraser's cheeks became suffused with blushes, and tears filled her eyes; but if either of these emotions were noticed by her unfeeling husband, he said or did nothing to denote the slightest contrition for having occasioned these symptoms of discomposure.

Selina prepared to depart, and her movement recalled Mr. Fraser from the moody

state of abstraction into which he seemed to have fallen for the last few minutes. "We have not as yet spoken of wages," said he, and the word grated harshly on the ear of Selina,—“what do you demand?”

“Forty pounds a year.”

“Forty pounds! that is a very large sum. I should have thought twenty-five pounds a year quite sufficient. The present maid of Mrs. Fraser has only that sum.”

“For a person who is to act as companion as well as lady’s maid, a less sum than the one I have named, Sir, would not enable me to make a suitable appearance. I must also premise that I cannot consent to take my meals with the servants; with the housekeeper I have no objection, but it would not suit me to dine in the servants’ hall.”

“Humph,” said Mr. Fraser; “well, well, this won’t make any great difference—you may have your meals served in your own room. Of course your tea, sugar, and washing are included in the 40/., and your beer money too.”

“Yes, Sir,” replied Selina, anxious to get

over this part of the affair, and heartily disgusted with the sordidness of the *millionnaire*.

The situation was so very untempting, that she was much disposed at once to decline it; but the pensive countenance of the fair young wife appealed so strongly to her sympathy, that her desire to soothe, if not to ameliorate her position, triumphed over the distaste she had conceived against becoming a dependent on the gloomy and irascible Mr. Fraser. The countenance of his poor wife, too, had no inconsiderable influence on the decision of Selina. Her mild expression, and lady-like demeanour, so different from the pert self-sufficiency, or servile submission appertaining to the general class of *suivantes*, had greatly impressed Mrs. Fraser in her favour; the purity of her diction, the agreeable tone of her voice, and her personal attractions also, had their due weight in winning the good will of the youthful and unhappy wife. There is, whatever some persons may assert to the contrary, a sympathy, a sort of freemasonry in beauty, and particularly in that species of it which

consists in an expression of goodness, that draws those who possess it towards each other. Both women, in the present instance, were conscious of this magnetic effect, and felt predisposed to become friends; and when Selina closed her agreement with Mr. Fraser, his wife longed to tell her how much gratified she felt by the arrangement. Mrs. Buxton was to be written to, and Mrs. Steadfast was to be seen, relative to the character of Miss Stratford, and if the result proved satisfactory, Selina was to enter her new position.

She withdrew, and left Mrs. Fraser most desirous that she should soon return.

“She is too pretty, but that can’t be helped,” soliloquized Mr. Fraser, “and may after all prove advantageous. Handsome women are always jealous of each other, and envy in this case will be added to that passion; for how can this very good-looking girl see the riches and splendour that surround my wife without being envious? This will render her a willing spy over Amy, and make her carefully obey my instructions.”

So reasoned the obtuse nabob, and so reason many men, who believe they comprehend women, because they judge by a few of the unworthy specimens of the sex that may have fallen in their way, and who, thinking that the beauty of other women detracts from their own, are disposed to dislike and malign them.

In due time the answer arrived from Mrs. Buxton, who, haunted by remorse at having believed aught to the prejudice of Selina, had, ever since the proofs of her innocence had been furnished, longed for an opportunity to make atonement to her, and gladly seized this one. Every eulogium that good feeling could convey, was lavished on Miss Stratford by the good-natured but weak-minded woman, who missed her society every day, yet had not moral courage sufficient to entreat her return, lest such a measure might be offensive to her noble neighbours. Mrs. Steadfast gave an equally high character of Miss Stratford, and Mr. Fraser, being now fully satisfied of her merits, wrote to request she would enter his establishment as soon as possible. The arrangements

for her reception far surpassed her expectations. They were not only comfortable, but even elegant; for Mr. Fraser, reasoning like a selfish and cunning man, determined, by making Selina's position as comfortable as possible, to attach her to it, and render her willing to do all his behests rather than risk losing it.

END OF VOL. II.

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